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ABSTRACT

This report describes early childhood development (ECD) in Africa and the Bernard van Leer Foundation's strategies for early childhood programs in African nations. Chapter 1 examines the context in which Africa's children are growing up, focusing on the hardships that many children face, as well as the efforts made by families, communities, and international groups to alleviate the effects of economic decline, inadequate services, war, and civil strife. Chapter 2 reviews the importance of the early years on children's development and discusses the kinds of outcomes that ECD programs should be seeking. Chapter 3 discusses the roles of individuals and groups who come into contact with children, including primary caregivers, secondary caregivers, community organizations, policymakers, and governments. Chapter 4 examines what roles these same individuals and organizations should play in ECD programs. Chapter 5 deals with the costs and effects of ECD programs. Chapter 6 serves as a conclusion and discusses the key issues of the ECD debate in Africa, including the holistic development of children, multisectoral programs, and the needs of women and girls. (MDM)

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Building on people's strengths:

early childhood in Africa

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This book captures with great success the vulnerability of young children. It also articulates the vast opportunities that can be made available for their development.

Such opportunities are of great importance to children and their caregivers. I believe that policy and decision makers should seriously consider the implementation of the measures proposed here.

MWALIMU JULIUS K NYERERE

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Introduction

Children in Africa today lead a very different life from that of their grandparents. In those days, there were more certainties in life – or so it seems now. Most of their grandparents were brought up in extended families, surrounded by their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, cousins, and all the other people in the village. The adults spent their days much as their grandparents had done, while the children played together and carried out their specific tasks with little interference from outside.

It was not an idyllic time, however. Many babies died in infancy, many diseases were endemic, causing high rates of premature deaths among children and adults. In addition, there were droughts and famine, and many villagers had almost nothing they could call their own. In those far-off days, children were the only riches the villagers had. While children were seen as insurance for old age, they were also sources of pride and pleasure, testimony to the continuity of family and tradition.

Life today seem far more complex, with few certainties about the future. Since many people have migrated to urban areas, extended families are no longer so common in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Many adults have had to learn new skills and engage in wage employment. Children are expected to attend school and learn many things that their grandparents did not even dream existed. While knowledge of preventive health has improved enormously and a vast array of medical and nutritional information and assistance exists, these are only available to those fortunate enough to live near a well-provided health post.

Despite all these changes, one certainty holds: children remain their parents' riches. However, these 'riches' are often treated very poorly by the larger world community.

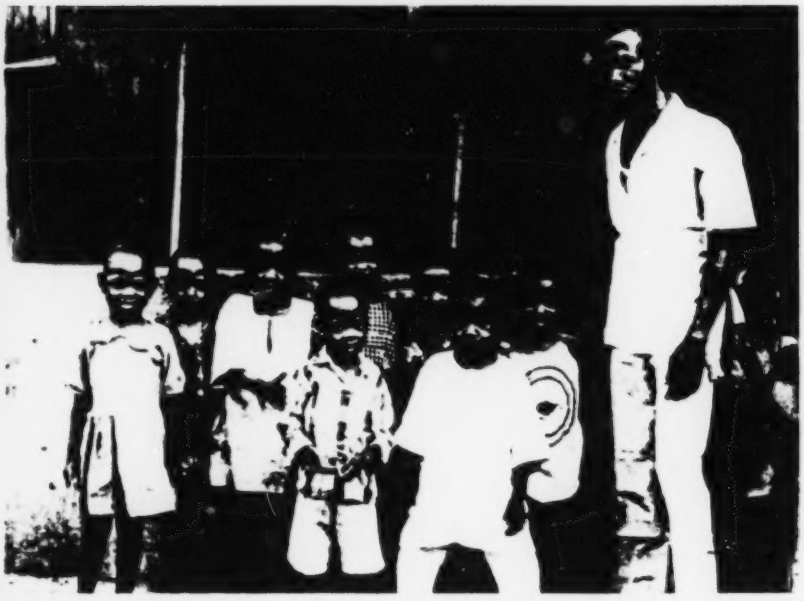
If children are recognised as the most important asset, each generation must invest in them for the very survival of the human race. Investment in the well-being, education and skills development of children is fundamental to the economic prosperity, the political stability, and the environmental integrity of any area, including Africa.

In fact, though we know that the earliest years of a child's life are the most crucial, the proportion of resources allocated to the support of young children and their mothers worldwide is so minute that it rarely appears in national or international statistics.

The early years are crucial because of the speed of growth. Research shows that growth occurs more rapidly during the first two years than at any other time of life. By the age of six, for example, the child's brain has reached 90 per cent of its adult size. During those first six years, therefore, all infants and children have a particular need for love and care, good nutrition, a safe environment, and stimulation and

Does Africa need early childhood programmes?

One message emerged loud and clear from the early childhood seminar held in Lesotho: the vast majority of young children in Africa grow up without the 'benefits' of early childhood programmes. As traditional coping skills, particularly in the area of socialisation of the young, are intact and thriving in much of the continent, we can ask: does Africa need early childhood programmes?



The response to that question is mixed. When the experience of many existing programmes is analysed, the negative aspects can seem to outweigh the positive ones. Negative aspects include: over-emphasis on centres, too much concentration on a cognitive approach, a perception of pre-school as 'grade zero' of primary school, separation from parents and community caused by imposed or non-indigenous curricula, limited coverage of three to six year olds, and neglect of the children aged zero to three who do not attend centres.

Participants agreed that ECD programmes could enhance the development of young children in Africa in many ways. They emphasised the many positive aspects of traditional childrearing patterns and socialisation. But most participants agreed that ways should be found to blend traditional practices with the needs and possibilities of a modern society. The key word is **blend.**
In emphasising 'modern' aspects, many ECD programmes appear to dismiss or denigrate customary practice. This can result in parents and communities feeling disempowered, confused and neglected.
Participants favoured holistic programmes that encompass, on the one hand, all aspects of a child's development and, on the other, treat the children as part of the society around them. It was also agreed that parents and communities must play a crucial role. Programmes must not be imposed, whether by international donor agencies, local NGOs or governments.

A **system** of ECD should incorporate a variety of the provisions and services that exist within a country, province or even a single community. These provisions and services depend on the needs and capabilities of the people and groups concerned.

While existing programmes have focused on establishing ECD centres, they can cater for only a small number of three to six year olds. Therefore, they do not reach the vast majority of young children. Centres should serve the entire community, providing a base for immunisation, growth monitoring, nutrition, health, literacy, parents' discussion groups and other community activities.

Outreach programmes are essential to address the needs of those not attending ECD centres as well as those of the very youngest children. These outreach programmes could be based at existing ECD centres. Training should focus on the many individuals within communities who already play vital roles in regard to children: birth attendants, traditional health practitioners, religious leaders, elders and others. These people would then be in a position to blend 'new' information in such areas as health, nutrition, and the important role of play with traditional practice.

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 66, April 1992.

encouragement to develop all their faculties. In today's world, however, very few families, even in the wealthiest countries, can provide all of this unaided.

This publication is a contribution to the process of improving opportunities for young children in Africa. The Bernard van Leer Foundation has been supporting initiatives in early childhood development (ECD) since the 1960s. It is a private foundation, working in nearly 50 countries around the world to support local organisations that endeavour to improve the quality of life for young children in disadvantaged circumstances. The Foundation is in constant dialogue with the programmes that it supports, learning from them and disseminating their findings as widely as possible.

As part of this dialogue, the Foundation organised a seminar in Maseru in November 1991, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Lesotho. The seminar was attended by participants from 11 countries of sub-Saharan Africa and representatives of international organisations.

The seminar's title was: **Child development in Africa: building on people's strengths.** A week of intensive discussion did not come up with easy solutions but it produced a commitment by all present to do what they could for young children in Africa. This publication is an outcome of that seminar. While it is not the official report of the seminar, it draws on many of the themes and includes additional material.

Building on the strengths that exist

Participants at the seminar agreed that the way forward is to build on the many strengths that exist: the women, the men, the communities and the many groups that now look after Africa's children. In this context, many questions were posed:

- Within communities, many people are helping others: what can be done to support them?

- Early childhood programmes have a positive impact on communities: can we identify why they are having such an impact?

- People cooperate and share for their mutual benefit: can this sharing and cooperation be extended into other areas of their lives?

- Traditionally, children are prepared for adult life from a very early age by participating in household and family duties: how can this process be adapted to prepare children for the next century – with the best traditions retained?

- How can we all develop an instinctive ability to listen to the community and interpret its strengths, not imposing our agendas but building on what the community already does and knows?

- Are early childhood programmes actually needed? (See the panel opposite)

This seminar has had a profound influence on the Foundation's thinking. This publication is, therefore, more than a follow-up. It is also an attempt by the Foundation to articulate its programme strategies in Africa more specifically. These start from a perspective that recognises, validates, and attempts to improve the child care activities that ordinary people have created in the face of overwhelming constraints and problems. This means that the Foundation, in its programme in Africa, is willing to identify and support child development activities through a somewhat wider lens than previously. This document seeks to reflect this broader perspective, combining what is already being done by communities on behalf of children and the best that modern pedagogy has to offer.

This publication begins with a brief look at the context in which Africa's children are growing up. The context is by no means auspicious as it encompasses economic decline, inadequate services, health risks, civil conflict and war. However, positive policy developments have been seen at national and international levels, and extraordinary efforts have been made for children all over the continent by families, communities, and numerous local groups, providing a practical base to build on.

Blending the 'traditional' with the 'modern'

In Chapter Two we look at the importance of the early years and the kinds of outcomes that ECD programmes should be seeking. Emphasis is laid on the need to blend the 'traditional' with the 'modern', rather than positing them as irreconcilable opposites. A number of different approaches to early childhood programmes are discussed, but it is emphasised that no programme should seek to impose alien concepts. Instead, it should build on what exists, recognising the basic needs: a child-friendly environment and attention to the needs of women.

Chapter Three looks at the many actors on the ECD stage: primary caregivers, consisting of family and immediate community; secondary caregivers who are involved with young children through their work; people and organisations that come into contact with young children and their families; and those who make decisions, decide policies, and allocate resources. The training needs of primary and secondary caregivers are also considered here.

In Chapter Four we look at these same actors from the perspective of responsibility: who does what? Who should be responsible for which aspects of ECD programmes? What are the roles of parents, communities, NGOs, governments, the mass media, international donors, and the business world? What should their roles be?

Chapter Five deals with the costs and effects of ECD programmes. We discuss the concept of 'low cost' and suggest that this is an illusion that should no longer be pursued. Instead, it is necessary to agree the desired outcomes of programmes and understand the effects, which may be extensive. Costs should then be judged on the basis of how affordable these programmes are in the specific situation.

In Chapter Six we draw together the main threads and discuss the key issues of the ECD debate in Africa. These include the holistic development of children, multi-sectoral programmes, and the needs of women and girls. We recognise that

programmes will only be effective in the long term if they are rooted in communities. Programme planners should be prepared to build on what exists and adapt to changing needs.

The way that young children are perceived

As this publication seeks to influence policies and practice for children in Africa, it is aimed at policy makers, decision makers, planners and those who implement programmes. Among such people we include many who are not normally associated with early childhood development: people who work in government planning departments and finance ministries, who oversee employment policies, who make decisions about land allocation and use, who decide about the distribution of water, health and other basic services, as well as members of the business community and professionals. **All of these people have an influence on the way that young children are perceived.** Given sufficient understanding of the needs of children and their importance to society, they are in a position to help to ensure that young children and their families get the attention and support that they, and society, need.

This publication is also aimed at our colleagues in other foundations and in international and bilateral funding agencies. Naturally, we do not expect to persuade them to abandon all their current policies and immediately transfer all their support to early childhood. Indeed, we would not wish them to, for we favour a vigorous and varied approach to development. We do hope, however, that they will ponder the needs of young children and their families, that they will learn something from our experiences and our suggested approaches, and that they will take the needs of the youngest members of society into account in all the programmes and projects that they support.

The contents of this publication represent the views and beliefs of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. These are based on experience gained from the many programmes we have supported over the years. The many individuals involved in those programmes have also taught us a great deal. But it should be understood that responsibility for the contents of this publication is ours alone.

Children are the great strength of Africa, its most important asset, the representatives of its future. Perhaps the continent's greatest weakness is that it does not recognise the many strengths to be found within its own societies. We hope, therefore, that this publication will go some way towards redressing that imbalance.

BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION
The Hague, August 1994

Chapter *One*

Children in Africa: the context

This is a bewildering and eventful time to be a child. While this statement probably applies to late 20th century children everywhere, childhood has an especially poignant flavour in the developing world. This is because the very notion of 'childhood' is only now beginning to be recognised in its own right. It is a concept that is still precariously balanced between the declining old order and an unknown future. In Africa, in particular, the experience of childhood now takes place against a backdrop of major political and technological change. As this millennium draws to an end, the way in which people's lives, and especially children's lives, are changing, signals profound and irrevocable transformations.

The overall context is mixed. On the one hand, negative factors include economic decline, widespread malnutrition, inadequate health and education infrastructures, food shortages and famines, drought and other natural disasters, health risks from HIV/AIDS, malaria, acute respiratory infections and many other diseases, civil conflict and war. On the other hand, positive aspects exist at many levels: family, community, government and international.

Positive signs

Many African babies are born healthy. Many are immunised against the major diseases and have loving and secure relationships within their families. All over Africa, community groups and other organisations have established programmes to support the development of young children.

The experience of agencies involved in the delivery of primary health care to remote and impoverished African communities provides evidence that ordinary Africans are particularly interested in the well-being and health of their children. Many are anxious to learn techniques and to adopt behaviour that will enhance their children's potential in this rapidly changing world. It is remarkable, for example, to see the enormous sacrifices that adults willingly make in order to ensure adequate education for their children. The literature is full of examples of parents and other caregivers embracing completely new life styles in order to take advantage of opportunities for children.

In 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child made free and compulsory primary education an obligation of the state and the right of all children. This convention has been ratified by more than 150 countries, including more than half of Africa's leaders.

That same year saw the first of a series of three international conferences that provided a stimulus for governments throughout Africa to take action. At the **World Conference on Education for All** in Jomtien (Thailand), 38 African countries signed the Jomtien Declaration recognising the importance of early childhood development.

The goals of the Declaration include universal access to and completion of primary education, 50 per cent reduction in adult illiteracy (with special emphasis on illiteracy among women), expansion of early childhood development activities, and exploitation of all available instruments of information, communication and social action to assist people to acquire the minimum basic learning necessary for a better life.

All these goals are critical in restoring education to its rightful place at the centre of development.

Later in 1990, the **World Summit for Children** issued a declaration which included a call for expanded ECD activities. More than half of Africa's leaders, a total of 44, committed themselves to dramatic reductions in child deaths and child malnutrition by the year 2000. Achieving the 27 specific goals adopted at the Summit would bring massive declines in infant and child mortality and malnutrition as well as universal access to clean water, adequate sanitation and primary education. The declaration led directly to the development of National Plans of Action (NPAs) that focus on the needs of children.

Encouragement for developing these NPAs was given a boost in 1992 at the third conference: the **OAU International Conference on Assistance to African Children**. Here a true breakthrough for Africa was seen in an official acknowledgement that

'children are a priority'. Despite the overwhelming political and economic problems that confront African governments, many of them have agreed, in charters, conventions, treaties and agreements, that the psycho-social, health and educational needs of children deserve priority.

The NPA process itself is significant. In many countries it has precipitated a wide-ranging review of government expenditure decisions as well as a renewed commitment to give priority to human development. In several countries, the development of an NPA has included not only governments but donors, community groups, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Together the provisions of the Summit Declaration, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the NPAs provide an essential framework for the survival, protection and development of Africa's children.

Another sign of action came a year later, in 1993, when a follow-up conference in Burkina Faso made an urgent appeal to African governments to give absolute priority to the education of girls in their NPAs (see panel, page 14).

These international initiatives on children have been matched by the quickening pace of political change all over Africa. At the OAU Summit in 1990, African leaders adopted the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development, thus committing themselves to fostering human-centred participatory development. This means that community groups, NGOs, professional associations and women's groups are gradually being recognised as part of the political process. Increasingly, through more democratic political structures, people are making decisions about their own development.

All this activity and apparent commitment could lead us to take a highly optimistic view: that a formidable alliance of children, their families, communities and political leaders appears to be poised to harness all available energy and resources to ensure lasting and positive changes to the condition of children.

However, an unfortunate gap looms between this potential crusade for and on behalf of children and the stark realities of daily life.

The stark realities of daily life

Malnutrition is a critical component of the crisis facing Africa's children. Unlike other regions of the developing world, the prevalence of malnutrition among children in Africa did not decline in the last decade.[1] In most African countries, chronic malnutrition, evidenced by stunted growth, is more common than acute malnutrition, also known as 'wasting'. Malnutrition is insidious because it acts both as cause and effect: it contributes to disease and death among children – and is itself caused by disease and dietary deficiency.

All over Africa, household food insecurity, inadequate sanitation, and poor child care practices exacerbate the malnutrition picture. Poor child care practices often stem from inadequate knowledge as well as lack of time and other resources.

South Africa: accommodating the unpredictable

A small child stands rigid in trauma; another throws stones; a group wields sticks: all disturbing evidence of the profound effects that violence can have on children.

These incidents occur with some frequency in the pre-schools cooperating with the Border Early Learning Centre in South Africa. As a result, the curriculum for children and the training of workers now includes special elements on violence.

In the lead-up to the election of April 1994, South African society underwent massive change. Violence and unrest increased. The children who have grown up in this unstable political and social environment have also had their education disrupted.

The unrest has had direct practical consequences as well: with the local economy seriously affected, living standards have declined. Levels of unemployment, already high, are rising. Most people have less money and there is increasing malnutrition. In addition, informal support structures are being weakened and access to health care limited.

Violence calls for special attention in the curriculum. Workers need special preparation to be able to perceive what is happening to the children, analyse the situation and find appropriate ways to deal with it. All this is included in their pre-service and in-service training, and the views of parents and other members of the community are sought as well. Many stress-reducing activities are considered, such as play and story telling.

Role play can be very useful in trauma management. The process of acting out a disturbing experience appears to help young children to come to terms with it in a healthy way. Drawings can be equally useful, as can playing with clay or painting with mud or paint.

The curriculum must be flexible enough to respond to what is really happening to children.

Coping with violence is not a matter of introducing a new curriculum but of accentuating and adapting current materials through careful observation and monitoring.

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 69, January 1993

While African children constitute about 10 per cent of the world's children, fully one third of the 40,000 children worldwide who die every day are African. Mortality statistics are often regarded as a barometer of the condition of children. The IMR (Infant Mortality Rate – the number of deaths during the first year of life per 1,000 live births) is generally accepted as an international gauge of child well-being. According to this standard, still births and first-week deaths (perinatal mortality) give an indication of the level of medical care available.

In contrast, avoidable deaths from the second week to the twelfth month (postperinatal mortality) are generally seen as socially determined. For millions of African children, high morbidity rates prove beyond doubt that the basic issues – safe drinking water, sanitation and sewerage, and malnutrition – have still to be tackled.

Economic decline

The human development crisis currently facing Africa's children has its origins in the massive economic decline which began to affect African countries in the early 1980s. According to the World Bank, six African countries plummeted from 'middle-income' to 'low-income' status during the 1980s, while the number of least developed countries in Africa rose from 17 to 28.[2]

This decline and falling investment precipitated a consistent fall in GDP per capita all over Africa, as well as a steep fall in per capita food production and a 25 per cent reduction in per capita consumption, already dangerously low.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Africa's external debt stood at less than US$ 50 billion. By the early 1990s, however, it had reached well over US$ 250 billion. During the same period, investment fell from 25 per cent to only 15 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Official Development Assistance (ODA) stagnated. The gap between Africa and the rest of the world grew wider than ever before. The combined Gross National Product (GNP) of the entire continent south of the Sahara is now less than that of The Netherlands.

Remote as these statistics may seem from the everyday lives of Africa's children, their cumulative impact has been devastating. The collapse of commodity prices has meant massive declines in government revenues and consequently fewer resources to support the basic services which are critical for the welfare of children. In rural areas, for example, health centres in many African countries are barely equipped to treat even the most rudimentary health problems. Schools are seriously run down; many lack desks, books, paper and pencils.

In urban areas, the story is similar. As large numbers of migrants have left the rural areas in search of a better life in the city, urban authorities have been overwhelmed by a rise in demand for public services, especially safe water and adequate sanitation.

In the context of this macroeconomic crisis, it has been impossible for African governments to maintain even a minimum level of public services, let alone to expand these services to meet the special needs of street children, AIDS orphans and child victims of violence.

Africa's development partners, led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, viewed the crisis as resulting primarily from inadequate domestic economic policies. This led them to concentrate their response on support for **structural adjustment**. Various studies have shown that, at least in the case of the early adjustment programmes, public expenditure cuts which restricted access to health and education services did not ease the impact of Africa's economic crisis – but actually made it worse.[3] The international community's preoccupation with structural adjustment has meant that many of Africa's deepest economic problems – trade losses, rising debt obligations, stagnant ODA flows and protectionism in the developed countries – have not received the attention they deserve.

Other aspects of the crisis lie well outside the sphere of 'structural development'. War, political instability and recurrent drought have had a devastating effect. In 1993 there were an estimated six million refugees and 35 million internally displaced people in Africa, a high percentage of whom are children.

In many African countries, civil conflict has caused large migrations from insecure areas to provincial or national capitals, increasing the number of children who are orphaned or separated from their families and who must live with the physical and emotional trauma of war. Early childhood programmes in areas of conflict increasingly find that children show disturbing evidence of the profound effects of violence. To help these children, particular care and attention must be provided by everyone in the children's environment, as discovered by the Border Early Learning Centre in South Africa (see panel, page 9).

Gender inequalities

The problems of Africa's children are compounded by gender inequalities. While African women perform a disproportionate amount of the work on the continent, they receive about one tenth of the income and have title to perhaps one hundredth of its property. They lag behind men in education. Disparities in primary school enrolments of boys and girls remain significant in much of the continent. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, only six females are enrolled in secondary schools for every ten males. Nearly 65 per cent of African women over 15 are illiterate, compared to 40 per cent of males. High levels of illiteracy among women, coupled with poor availability of basic life skills information, are closely associated with high rates of female fertility and child malnutrition.

Against this, African women are key actors in local development. They are prominent community leaders and organisers of development activities, they often predominate in village health committees, and they are highly active in the education sector. They are the prime initiators of new civic groups focused on environmental protection and participatory development.

Despite this kind of local activism, women remain largely excluded from decision making at national level. To compound the problem, existing family law (whether customary or codified) rarely provides adequate protection by establishing, for example, a minimum age for marriage. Similarly, statute law has rarely entrenched

When women have the money

Black South African women are undoubtedly overworked, underpaid and insufficiently supported, both economically and in their job of caring for children, by either the men in their lives or by the state. Despite the hardships of single women, they nonetheless have the advantage of being able to make autonomous decisions about their income and their activities.

In fact, some studies indicate that children may be better off in women-headed households. For example, research in Kenya and Malawi has found that some female-headed households with very low incomes have lower levels of malnutrition among pre-school children than in male-headed households with high incomes.

Sources: Richter, L. (1993) 'Many kinds of deprivation: young children and their families in South Africa' Paper presented at *International Conference on Theory and Practice of Early Childhood Intervention - Family, School and Literacy: The Preschool Period* organised by the Netherlands Commission for UNESCO, The Hague, 6-9 September 1993; Kennedy, E. and Peters, P. (1992) 'Household food security and child nutrition: the interaction of income and gender of household head', in *World Development*, Vol. 20, pp. 1077-1085.

the rights of women vis-à-vis male household members in community custom. The evolution of customary law, notably on inheritance and access to land, has also tended to erode the rights of women.

Without even the law as protection, many women find themselves having to bring up their families alone. Despite the hardships, there is evidence that their children may sometimes fare better than those in two-parent households (see panel, left).

Gender inequalities need to be addressed from childhood. Increased attention to the health and education of girls and to literacy among women can yield extraordinary benefits in terms of their own futures, the enhanced contribution they will make to society, lowered birth rates, and the health and education of their children.[4]

The extended family

'Delocalisation' of rural African communities is a process in which old village-based economies have become incorporated into, and dependent upon, modern national and international economies. The increasing vulnerability of women and children in this process is well documented.[5] The process is exacerbated by the current three-pronged 'slow-onset' disaster that threatens the African child and family: structural adjustment programmes, AIDS/HIV and the ubiquitous drought. All these factors attack the very essence of children's resilience and strength: the extended family.[6]

However, it would be premature to predict the demise of the extended family. It is a coping mechanism of infinite versatility, the organic and integral response of ordinary people, and it may yet surprise us all. Despite the apparent onslaught on the extended family, there is evidence from every corner of the continent that it remains the most dependable unit for most people to fall back upon in times of adversity. Closely connected with the basic fortitude of the extended family are neighbourhood- and kinship-based voluntary associations, such as those for informal childminding, rotating credit, and burial associations. These associations represent the essence of the everyday social fabric of poor Africans.

All over the continent vigorous examples of resilient institutions abound: *tontines* (West Africa), *stokvels* (South Africa), *haghads* (Somalia), *edirs* (Ethiopia), *xitique* (Mozambique) are examples of institutions that thrive amongst the poorest of African families. The very strength of such indigenous institutions, in places like Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and other countries under acute stress, clearly show that the basic organic units of African society continue to be vibrant. They represent the most formidable platform for the well-being of children.

A 'typical' African child

As African children cope with rapid change all across the continent, they often show great resourcefulness despite considerable poverty and travail. But which African children are we concerned with?

It is clearly impossible to describe the situation of the average or 'typical' African child. There are so many situations and so many profound differences within and between different regions, countries, classes, countries, ethnic groups – and even

within the same family (for example, at a different stage of the developmental cycle). Childhood is, moreover, in continual flux: not only is it a category with a constantly changing membership, but the needs of children change over time and in different circumstances.

Take the toddler living on the banks of the Nile in rural isolation on the Ethiopia-Sudan border. While this community is virtually unaffected by the trappings of the modern state, it is rapidly becoming all too familiar with the destructive capacity of modern weapons.

Take the Nigerian teenager pregnant and homeless at the age of 13. Consider a Mozambican refugee child who has witnessed the rape and murder of her mother. She may have walked for weeks and may have been obliged to accept sexual harassment or attack in return for shelter. Consider a four year old child from Soweto whose play convincingly mimics the painful writhing death of a youth. Or take a Nairobi street child who keeps hunger at bay by sniffing glue – or a Durban child nearly beaten to death by frustrated and unemployed parents. Or a group of AIDS orphans living, working and studying together in their parents' home in Uganda. Or an Angolan child undergoing amputation without anaesthetic in the madness of the civil war.

It is easy to give a series of 'vignettes'; however, this denies the variety of experiences and the spectrum of conditions and different coping mechanisms that children are exercising throughout the continent. The mass media are particularly skilled in focusing on the plight of children but make a practice of illustrating the problems – without shedding any light on the successes. As everywhere, 'good news' often goes unreported.

The media do not report, for example, on children like the Ju/'hoan baby, surrounded by love and responsiveness in her Namibian village (see panel, left). We rarely hear about the resourceful and enterprising street child who provides much needed support to his mother and sisters by shining shoes and guarding cars. Nor do we hear of the newly urbanised youngster who takes the metropolis in her stride and learns how to juggle school and job in a relentless drive for improvement. Even more rarely are we treated to examples of parents who manage to protect and prepare their children for the challenges of the modern world.

In the space of a single generation, entire communities have witnessed social and political change on a scale so great that it almost defies understanding or analysis. Some members of even the most remote communities have now experienced at first hand the tremendous power of education and literacy and the way in which it can transform the fortunes of a family.

Since remote tribes are now firmly part of modern states, they are now subject to taxation and control, a total change from the past. Even the strongest and most unified families have experienced the pressures and dangers that contact with metropolitan centres exerts on the family. Yet is is clear that many are learning to cope with these dangers.

Namibia: be born and you shall be attended

'The education of a Ju/'hoan begins at birth with a simultaneous intensity, ease and sweetness. From her first moments, baby Khoba was welcomed into a partnership with a society and a mother whose presence, attention and care focused on her baby's needs. The first few days, Khoba could be found nestled next to her mother's body, near her breast, the warm hollow of her arm, or just against her back. Older children and adults came to see, to welcome this tiny new Ju/'hoan. By the end of her first week, Khoba could be found near the breast of various grandmothers. By the end of her second week, she came on old =Aisa's breast and sat with us at our school. I have never heard her cry ... she seemed enveloped in a cocoon, a halo, of warmth and responsiveness. It would seem that a baby's first lesson is "cry and you shall be heard" ... or perhaps, even deeper and more basic, "be born and you shall be attended". For her needs seemed known and responded to, often before she voiced them herself.'

Source: from an informal progress report by Melissa Heckler, Early Childhood Educator, Namibia, 1992. Reproduced by kind permission of the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation

Top priority for girls' education

The Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 29 March to 1 April 1993, made 'an urgent appeal' for African governments to give education of girls absolute priority in their national development plans.

This conference is considered a milestone in Education For All initiatives as it was the first region-wide meeting to focus exclusively on the issues of educational deprivation of girls.

The Declaration called upon governments to:

- undertake analytical assessments of the social and educational situation of girls and women
- design and implement strategies to reduce gender disparity in education and to eliminate such disparities by the year 2000
- make teachers and the curriculum sensitive to gender issues
- report any progress to the United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995.

Organised jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF, in cooperation with the government of Burkina Faso, the conference attracted almost 200 participants from 45 African countries, including eight ministers of education and representatives from regional bodies, multilateral and bilateral institutions, and NGOs.

Source: *EFA 2000* No. 12, July-September 1993. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Children in particular are faced with awesome responsibilities and challenges. In some cases, they grow up in conditions in which traditional models are invalid and existing institutions have yet to adjust to the great changes that confront them. These children are often remarkably resilient and many become master improvisers. Given the reality that faces these children, it is remarkable that so many appear not only to survive but to thrive in these abjectly bad conditions.

Only a minority of African children are in some type of formal education. The vast majority are on the receiving end of what Kottak calls 'the fallacy of over-innovation'.[7] This refers to solutions imposed upon communities from the outside rather than organic solutions that are intrinsic and spontaneous. Here perhaps lies the most fertile grounds for genuine optimism regarding the fate of Africa's children: a faith that ordinary people will, if given time and enough support, be able to marshall their strength and invent appropriate solutions for their children. Therefore, those who want to help should refrain from imposing solutions but instead learn to support and enhance the best organic solutions possible.

Focus of future policies

The position of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society is key to both current problems and future solutions. Young children and their mothers must become a focus of future policies, not ignored as in the past. Development policies of the 1980s have demonstrated the need to shift the emphasis from economic development to human development.

Development efforts must be decentralised down to the community and family levels to build on the many strengths that exist. Strengthening the position of women in social, education, health and economic terms will bring positive pay-offs to the individuals concerned and society as a whole. Mothers with a basic education are more likely to send their own daughters to school. In a similar vein, parents with a basic level of education are more likely to provide the necessary ingredients for the growth and development of their children, including adequate nutrition, protection against iodine deficiencies and common diseases, and psycho-social stimulus leading to better cognitive development.

Early childhood specialists regard all these factors as essential in preparing children to cope successfully in later years. Investments in women and children are not a luxury; they are necessary for the future economic and social well-being of society.[8]

The stakes for children are very high. Those of us who are privileged to work on behalf of children have an awesome responsibility to ensure that we do not waste opportunities to translate potential into fact.

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Chapter *Two*

What kind of Early Childhood Development does Africa need?

A number of essential factors contribute to the healthy development of children. These include: a stable relationship, love and stimulation, adequate nutrition, a safe and healthy physical environment, stimulation for the developing mind and body, and shelter and safety. While parents throughout Africa would of course like to provide all these for their children, many are unable to do so for reasons beyond their control. That is why ECD programmes that **support** rather than **replace** parents in their role as the children's first educators are needed.

During the early years, infants and children learn the basics of human behaviour (see panel, page 18). By the age of three, a child's character and personality are largely formed. Many of the social and moral values that will guide them through the rest of their lives have already been transmitted. Attention to children in the early years is therefore essential, not only for their sake, but for the future development of society as a whole.

Objectives of ECD programmes

What then should be the objectives of ECD programmes? First and foremost, to support mothers and children so that they are well-nourished and healthy. But survival must not be the only goal. The holistic development of children requires environments in which children feel secure, are stimulated, and have opportunities to explore, to question, to experiment, to play and to symbolise.

In addition to all these, a child needs an intimate interactive relationship with one or more caregivers. This caregiver can guide the child to participate in the shared system of skills, knowledge, needs and values which constitutes a culture. When children receive too little attention, they believe that what they do does not matter. They may soon stop trying altogether.

If young children's psycho-social needs are neglected, the consequence may be an increasing number of children, youths and adults who cannot effectively participate in the social order of a society – or who feel no need for it.[1]

Outcomes of ECD programmes

What kind of outcomes should ECD programmes aim at? In general terms, those that any nation would wish to strive for: competent and confident children who grow up to become problem-solving and creative adults, able to meet the challenges of modern living while retaining their cultural roots and identities.

Children's progress in school is frequently used as a measure of the effectiveness of an ECD programme. While a reduction in repetition of grades and in drop-out rates is certainly beneficial, we believe that desirable outcomes can be defined in broader and more enduring terms. Enhanced social skills, greater competence, and a facility for cooperating are all important. They help produce well-adjusted human beings who are motivated to learn and to become full participants in their society.

Africans have traditionally socialised their children by bringing them up surrounded by family and neighbours. These all shared the teaching of necessary tasks and passed on their society's values and culture. In this tradition, some members of the group had specific roles but everyone understood that bringing up the next generation was a **shared** job. Thus children learned naturally about the world they inhabited, how to do the jobs that needed doing, and how to become valued members of their group.

Changing patterns of life have broken down many aspects of this traditional system. Western concepts of 'education' have denigrated local culture and traditions so much that they are often seen as being of no value whatsoever. In Lesotho, for example, a visible dichotomy emerged between 'education' and 'culture'. As a result, the latter was viewed as a symbol of resistance and opposition to progress. But the local Basotho culture is not mired in the past: it is still alive and continually undergoing changes to accommodate new developments and meet new demands (see panel, 20).

How children develop

Learning begins at birth, but child development begins at conception. Therefore, good maternal health and nutrition are essential for healthy development. From birth, babies can see, hear, taste, smell, feel pain and touch. They display a wide range of emotional expressions – joy, anger, fear, surprise, sadness and interest, reacting to external events as early as one month of age. Infants actively communicate with others from the very beginning.

Although development continues throughout life, it is most fundamental and most rapid in the first months and years. What happens at one stage affects what happens in the future, either positively or negatively.

Child development occurs through interaction with people and things. Children are affected by and affect their surroundings. While child development follows certain patterns, the development of an individual child is a unique experience.

During the first year, infants master a whole range of motor skills. Their awareness of the movements of their bodies leads to understanding of cause and effect. They learn simple concepts and then use these to acquire and understand more complex ideas.

Babies are naturally curious and flourish when they feel secure in a supportive, sensitive and responsive environment. They soon begin to communicate verbally by interacting with people.

By about the age of three, children's language skills improve rapidly. They are socialised as they become aware of themselves as individuals and of the people around them, as well as their relationships and roles. They are able to understand and display emotion. They have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of their immediate environment and learn to imitate the behaviour of others.

Child development is multidimensional, integral and continuous. It involves physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions. These dimensions are interrelated: a change in one both influences and is influenced by changes in the others.

These new demands mean that children need to learn about things that their grandparents did not even know existed to survive and prosper in the modern world. **But there is no need to set the 'modern' against the 'traditional' as if they were implacably opposed**. It is necessary to blend them so that what is learned outside the home, in formal or informal settings, relates to the lives of the children. This ensures that parents and families have an understanding of what their children are learning, particularly in formal educational settings.

But the discussion involves more than content; it is also about methods. African ways of socialising young children use **covert methods** of learning. These emphasise practical aspects, imparting skills and preparing children for adulthood, and for

their future roles and occupations in society. This approach is informal, home- and community-based, and children learn by observing, doing and sharing experiences with others.

In contrast, 'modern' educational practice emphasises **overt teaching** which formalises the learning process. These methods tend to be didactic, with children told facts which they are expected to remember. The emphasis is not on understanding and being able to use the knowledge.

The kind of ECD that Africa needs, therefore, blends traditional and modern methods, taking into account children's present and future needs. Above all, it must involve parents and communities to the extent that they feel responsibility for their children's futures, rather than believing that 'education' is the responsibility of the school system, the teachers, or the government.

ECD programmes can support parents in many ways. The early childhood centre, or pre-school, though widespread, is only one way. The centres themselves can be used as the base for outreach programmes which:

- target older children and adolescents in their present role as caregivers and their future role as parents
- support parents and other caregivers in their homes and communities
- help traditional and existing caregivers increase their knowledge and adapt their methods
- implement campaigns of public information and education to raise the general level of awareness about the needs of young children
- enlist the help and support of organisations that are not usually involved with young children.

Two aspects are essential: promoting a child-friendly environment and caring for the health and well-being of women.

Promoting a child-friendly environment

Whatever programmes are developed for ECD in Africa, they will not succeed without a political, social and economic climate that is conducive to the welfare and proper development of children. The atmosphere in which children grow up is very important. At the family level, children need a loving and secure home environment. Children who enjoy a regular and balanced diet and have toys to play with may still fail to thrive because of conflict in the home. Many children do not even have a home. They have lost both parents and may grow up in emotionally sterile institutions or roam the streets at an early age.

These children manifest childhood depression and other behaviour disorders which affect their physical growth and development. Therefore, a truly holistic approach to ECD in Africa must incorporate attention to the emotional and personality needs of those children who are growing up in especially difficult circumstances.

In economic terms, the costs of poverty are very high when children are concerned: it exposes them to the risks of illness, poor nutrition, family stress or breakdown, low

Lesotho: Education for cultural development

Lesotho traditionally recognised no difference between education on the one hand and cultural development on the other. All educational institutions were vehicles for the dissemination of cultural norms and values. Education was the practice of culture. For both boys and girls, initiation was the only stage when 'education' took on a formal nature. But up to the present day, this formal educational institution is viewed by modern society as a concrete relic of traditional culture. In short, education then was primarily education for cultural development.

With the advent of Western education, a visible dichotomy began to emerge between education and culture. Education was introduced by and depended on Christian missions while the colonial administrations gave it security and legitimacy. Thus education was not only separate from the socio-cultural milieu of its time, but it was actually opposed to it in large measure. Culture was viewed as a symbol of resistance and opposition to progress, and cultural practices were met with a diverse set of direct and indirect punishments and sanctions. Education and culture became polarised, with proponents of local culture becoming enemies of educators. This antipathy has remained deeply embedded in Lesotho's social fabric.

Much of the agitation and reverberation in favour of cultural development at independence turned out to be political verbiage rather than a substantial commitment to revamp the culture of the people and restore their pride in it. Within Lesotho, however, the culture of the Basotho has shown a remarkable level of resilience. It still dominates life at birth and at burial, in times of joy and in times of bereavement, among the young and among the aged, among the modern and among the traditional. The Basotho people have retained a distinct culture that identifies them as a people. This is not to imply that culture is static, it grows and continually undergoes changes to accommodate new developments and to meet new demands.

Many of the present endeavours with regard to cultural development in Lesotho are sponsored by private companies and non-governmental organisations. However, the Ministry of Culture, with support from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, is actively identifying and encouraging local cultural talent.

Source: Lesotho's country paper on development of education 1990-1992. Report presented at the 43rd session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva, September 1992.

educational levels, and inadequate social support. The consequences for both children and the whole society can be disastrous: school repetition and dropout; a poorly educated, undernourished, unhealthy and unmotivated work force; delinquency; and the inter-generational perpetuation of failure and poverty. Given these scenarios, effective programmes must advocate the needs of young children, communicating with those who make policies and control resources. Such people are found in government, the civil service, local government, the business world, NGOs, churches, political parties and in communities. Public awareness programmes are closely related but have a somewhat different content. They aim to reach individuals in their homes, at their workplaces and meeting places.

Successful large-scale implementation of any ECD programme can only take place if government creates an enabling environment. This can be done through legislation, through the provision of information, and by setting an example. However, nations at war or in political, social and economic distress can rarely help promote, let alone guarantee, a proper environment for children.

The needs of women

Since child development begins at conception, the needs of mother and child cannot be separated. If the baby is to be born healthy and have a good chance of survival, the pregnant woman needs both practical and emotional support. A balanced diet is essential for the health of both mother and baby. When women are inadequately nourished, as is the case for about half the women in sub-Saharan Africa, their health is compromised, their physical and social development limited, and their ability to bear healthy children threatened.[2] Malnourished women get sick more often, have smaller babies, and die earlier. When infant and child mortality is high, birth rates are also high. Repeated pregnancies increase the stress on women's bodies, thus trapping both women and children in a cycle of poor health and nutrition.

Nearly two-thirds of pregnant women in Africa are anaemic. This condition increases their susceptibility to illness, complications in pregnancy, and maternal death.[3] In some African societies, cultural taboos discourage pregnant women from eating foods rich in needed iron, protein and calories. Similarly, in some societies adult women and girls only eat after the men and boys and may not get the more nutritious foods.

All of this underlines the importance of programmes that monitor women's health during pregnancy and provide nutritional supplements when necessary. But pregnant women need other forms of practical support: to help them prepare for the new baby, look after older children, and be cared for in the last months of pregnancy. Both practical and emotional support is needed before, during and after birth. Such support may come from the woman's partner, her mother or mother-in-law, other family members or friends and neighbours. If such support is not available for any reason, ECD programmes are needed to provide it.

The needs of the mother must not be forgotten after the baby is born. She is still in need of practical and emotional support. If she is not living in an extended family, this support may be lacking. The breastfeeding mother, in particular, needs to eat well herself to provide sufficient milk for her child.

Early childhood centres

The most common conception of an early childhood programme is a pre-school centre for children aged three to six. Such centres may be run by professionals or para-professionals, and parents and community members may or may not be involved. Since the centres may be provided by government or NGOs or the community, they differ widely. They may only provide custodial care or they may actively stimulate the children's development.

Children's groups in Mozambique

The district of Ilha de Moçambique consists of a small island off Mozambique's northeast coast and a part of the adjacent mainland. Since early 1991, the Association of the Friends of Ilha de Moçambique has been running a project with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Commission of the European Union.

Each day about 20 groups of around 50 children aged three to seven years meet for two to three hour periods. The groups are led by 'animators' who have been chosen by parents, local religious leaders, and cultural groups and trained by the project. About half the animators are male primary school teachers.

It is important to note that these are groups, not schools. They meet in different places: under a tree, near a house, in a mosque, depending on the weather. There are no set fees, as more than 90 per cent of the population live in extreme poverty, under conditions of high inflation. Parents pay what they can afford and mothers come to help. The animators receive a small incentive – sometimes money, sometimes food or clothes.

Parents have a large measure of control and decide on suitable educational and social activities. As the children's groups lack equipment or materials, they draw in the sand, use leaves and sticks, and play traditional games. They observe local artisans at work, making boats or fishing nets. They also visit monuments and local museums.

Naturally, a prime objective is to sustain this work. As the people have no money, the problem is to assure continuity without external funds. In one effort, parents and community leaders have taken it upon themselves to start a baseline survey, followed by exchange visits to introduce the concept to parents and community groups in other areas.

To sustain itself, the project seeks to generate income. For example, a machine to grind manioc was purchased, enabling women to pay less than to commercial grinders. The income is used to maintain the machine and to build a fund for the future. Similar strategies are being taken with other agricultural machinery, a photocopier and a project minibus.

Source: information supplied by Dr Luis Felipe Pereira, field staff, community leaders and parents in Ilha de Moçambique.

Pre-school centres were initially established in Africa largely as the result of Western influences. These held a 'professional' approach to be preferable to the existing informal caring systems. Over the years, such centres have proliferated and can now be found in all countries under a variety of names. Unfortunately, many of them continue to use a didactic 'teaching' approach that concentrates only on cognitive skills rather than relating to the home lives of the children.

Some critics contend that the centre-based approach is not an indigenous model. While this objection may have some validity, it fails to recognise that recent social changes have, in many cases, made the 'indigenous model' somewhat less compelling. For example, past generations gave children more opportunities to interact with their peers and with adults in a reasonably safe environment. But this

Nigeria: child care in markets

West Africa is known for its numerous markets. In downtown Lagos, for example, commuters caught in the notorious 'go-slows' – the almost permanent bumper-to-bumper traffic – can do their shopping from their cars. The market traders, occasionally with young children strapped alongside the merchandise, bring the 'market' to them.

In rural areas of Nigeria, markets operate every few days. The women selling their produce often bring their small children with them. They may also take them to the many urban markets. In Lagos Island, for example, the fisherwomen of Ilubirin, who weave fishing nets and smoke fish and shrimps, carry their babies as they trek to the streets and markets of Lagos. In Ibadan's sabon-gari market, women selling vegetables are accompanied by their children of varying ages.

Such women are beginning to establish child care facilities for themselves on market days. These tend to be run on a voluntary basis, with women taking turns to look after the children. While the women view child care as part of their normal activities, these informal centres are proving to be useful entry points for agencies that work with children.

In some areas, for example, church groups and NGOs have taken an interest. Basic rules of hygiene and health care are demonstrated, with UNICEF arranging immunisation for the children on market days. Some teaching takes place and games and basic snacks are sometimes made available. As the children look forward to coming to the market because of the centre, their happy and excited chatter now competes cheerfully with the normal market clamour.

is no longer the case in many urban and semi-urban areas. Nor is it the case in many rural areas. The adult members of the family may be struggling for survival while older siblings are at school. Even the grandparents may be far away or fighting their own battles for survival.

This means that, indigenous or not, some sort of 'centre' or other facility may be needed to meet the needs of the young children of these families. However, while early childhood centres certainly have a place in Africa, it is neither practical nor desirable to see them as the **only** approach.

Existing centres can only reach a small proportion of children in the three to six age range and are not economically viable on a large scale. They are, therefore, not equipped to deal with the effects of increased paid employment outside the home and the influence of formal schools. And they may not be oriented to local participation.

For local participation is important in the provision of day care. Parents and the community should be involved as much as possible in their establishment and management, helping to establish the curriculum and contributing to it in terms of local history, customs and traditions.

Contrary to some views, 'centres' do not have to be purpose-built; they can be in people's homes, under a tree, in borrowed premises, such as a church, clinic, or other community facility. As long as the environment is safe, its location is immaterial. **What matters is the quality of the care and attention given to the children.**

On Mozambique Island, for example, groups of children meet under trees and in homes and workplaces (see panel opposite). In this example, the whole community is involved in the children's learning and the children learn about the life around them in the most natural way possible.

In Nigeria, rural women selling their wares in the market often have little choice but to take their small children with them. These traders are now establishing child care facilities at the markets where children are immunised, receive health checks, and can be looked after in a safe environment (see panel on left).

In the next chapter we look at training for people involved in ECD and suggest ways in which centres can become more relevant to the children and their families.

Centres as a base for outreach

Early childhood centres can be multi-purpose and serve the whole community, reaching more children than those actually enrolled. In Kenya, for example, pre-schools are being used as the base for growth monitoring and the promotion of health and nutrition information (see panel, page 24). In many places, the centre is seen as a place for the community as a whole. Many of the activities are centred on children and families, offering parent education discussion groups, for example. There may also be clubs for older children, adult education classes, or general community meetings.

Growth monitoring in Kenyan pre-schools

The majority of pre-school teachers have initiated growth monitoring and promotion activities in their schools. These activities are aimed at children below six both in and out of pre-school. In consultation with parents, the teachers set one day a month for parents to bring their children in for growth monitoring. The parents who are literate weigh the children and plot the weights on a graph. On the same day, the teachers often invite nutritionists and officers from the Ministry of Health to come and discuss issues related to the welfare of children and families. Common topics of discussion include the importance of a balanced diet and how to prepare it using locally available foods. Immunisation, family planning, child care, and the causes, prevention and cure of children's diseases are also addressed.

Growth monitoring has been instrumental in improving the health care and nutrition of Kenyan children and their families. It has also provided opportunities for early intervention for children with problems since the teachers and health workers interact with these children before they join pre-school.

Source: Njenga, A. W., *A case study of district centres for early childhood education in Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Education. (Paper prepared for the South and East African Seminar on 'Collaborating for educational change in non-formal basic education' organised by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, January 1992.)

When early childhood centres are attached to schools, many opportunities arise to involve older children and adolescents in the work of the centre. For example, 'child-to-child' activities often concentrate on health issues, helping older children to learn about prevention of common diseases and accidents and treatment of some ailments. These children then pass on these messages to their families, and most particularly to their younger siblings. Adolescents too can learn about child development both in the classroom and in the centre, thus forming a conscious and valuable link between theory and practice.

In Botswana, children in the first three grades of primary school are considered 'little teachers'. They help to acclimatise younger children to the primary school and pass on health and safety messages (see panel opposite).

Support in the home

A home-based ECD programme is perhaps the most appropriate approach for much of Africa. This approach reaches parents and caregivers in their homes rather than in centres. It should be aimed at all those who take care of children, not only mothers, though they will, of course, remain the primary target group. Such programmes are implemented by women from the community, usually experienced mothers and those who have always supported women, such as traditional birth attendants.

In preparation for these programmes, the participants are given training and support and provided with some materials to pass on to the caregivers. A programme of home visits over a specified period is often included. During these visits, information is exchanged and the caregiver helped to adapt and reinforce her practices, as needed.

The essence of such programmes lies in the fact that parents are visited by their peers rather than by 'professionals' from outside the community. Women from the same community, with similar backgrounds and experiences, share what they know in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. **The importance of this peer-to-peer exchange cannot be over-emphasised as it models traditional methods of passing on knowledge.**

When such peer-to-peer interactions are part of a well-planned programme that includes training, support, supervision and relevant materials, they can achieve benefits for all concerned that are not possible through bureaucratically organised welfare services.

Peer-to-peer exchanges can benefit all parents. They are especially useful in reaching the isolated, alienated, insecure or passive parent. This includes:

- the young mother at home alone with a new baby
- the harassed parent coping with a number of closely spaced children
- the parent of the handicapped child
- the disadvantaged family overwhelmed by a multitude of problems.

These exchanges may also benefit people who have passively accepted their lot, too depressed to take stock of their own needs and capabilities.[4]

The little teachers of Botswana

Around 50,000 children at 44 schools in Botswana were participating in Child-to-Child (CTC) activities in 1991. Of these, nearly 8,000 were 'little teachers' – pupils in the first three grades of primary school – while the others were not yet old enough to attend school.

The Child-to-Child Foundation of Botswana was set up in 1979 as a result of the International Year of the Child. It was seen that children in rural areas of the country had problems adjusting to school life: the setting is unfamiliar, teachers are strange, and books, crayons and paint are foreign to their previous experience.

The CTC Foundation supports and assists schools with ideas and materials for the development of pre-school activities. It also runs workshops to train teachers in early childhood development. Primary school children are taught to pass knowledge and skills on to younger children. Parents and teachers are encouraged to work together so that the older generation can see and understand some of the changes taking place in terms of methods.

The CTC programme is seen as reviving traditional culture with children learning the rights and wrongs of society from their peers. It stresses that learning does not only take place in formal settings, that informal learning should be encouraged, and that children themselves can be agents of change.

In the programme, children from the first three classes have introductory sessions in which they become familiar with the content of the next CTC lesson – and also learn how to teach their pre-school partners. The primary and pre-school children often work in pairs, with the younger ones given opportunities to experiment with pencils, crayons, paint and paper. Games are used to inform children about going to the clinic, crossing the road, and dealing with snake bites.

CTC's results are positive. Participating pre-school children adapt to primary school more quickly and are less shy. Primary school children take more interest in their own lessons and tend to do better in class. The quality of communication among the children also improves.

Most important, this method enables older children to help develop an awareness of issues of culture and values in the young.

Sources: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 59, July 1990 and Child-to-Child Trust (1993) *Directory of Child-to-Child Activities Worldwide* **London, UK:** Child-to-Child Trust.

Building on what exists

ECD programmes should not seek to impose alien concepts. 'Alien' in this case can refer to concepts coming from another country or from the city to the village. Instead, programme planners should first investigate what actually exists. They can ask the people concerned – parents and community members – in order to determine the needs. While planners might expect to find a need for a new early childhood centre in every village or community, at community level the needs might be perceived very differently.

Support might be requested instead for health or nutritional advice or supplements, or for more information on the needs of young children. Support might be sought to strengthen the expertise and facilities of existing caregivers, to assist with sanitation and clean water, or to advise on income-generating activities so that parents can make their own choices about their children's futures. The possibilities are endless, and the needs expressed by local communities may sometimes surprise the planners.

This can be said with confidence: African countries need to ensure an environment in which children can grow up to fulfil their potential. Women's needs must be met if the condition of Africa's children is to improve. New 'indigenous' models of ECD must be developed, based on the knowledge and experience of families and communities and adapted to local conditions. These new models would combine the covert learning processes of traditional socialisation with the overt teaching methods of modern educational practice. They would thus recognise and accept the validity of local experience and traditional wisdom and be open to the global human environment as well.

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Chapter *Three*

Who is involved in Early Childhood Development?

When we talk of ECD workers, we immediately tend to think of professionals or para-professionals: men and women who have been trained, have received a certificate, and now stand in a classroom disciplining a crowd of little children. But in Africa, the overwhelming majority of children are cared for by the women who have traditionally cared for them: members of immediate and extended families and other women from the local community.

The 'typical' ECD worker is almost always a woman. She is a mother or a grandmother, a sister or an aunt, a cousin or a neighbour. She has known the child from birth and lives in the same home or very close by. In other words, typical ECD workers are the natural caregivers – the women or girls who have looked after young children since time immemorial.

In this chapter we look at the many different kinds of people, groups and institutions that affect the lives of young children, including, of course, the natural caregivers, and examine ways to support them. We start by dividing 'ECD workers' into four more or less distinct categories, though members of some categories may be surprised to be included at all.

Involvement of different groups

The first category consists of those who have **direct contact** with young children on a very regular basis in the course of everyday life. Here we include mothers and fathers, siblings and other family members. We also include other members of the community, such as elders, who come into frequent contact with the children or have traditional roles in children's upbringing. Finally, we include 'unofficial childminders'. These are people who may or may not receive payment for looking after other people's young children.

In the second category are people who are in touch with young children and their families as a **result of their work**. These include pre-school workers, home visitors undertaking outreach work, childminders who have received some training and are supervised, health workers, community workers, and the supervisors and trainers of these people.

The third category includes those who play a more **indirect role** in the lives of young children beyond their own families. Yet the following can all influence many aspects of children's environment: community leaders, school heads and teachers, church leaders and members, political leaders and members, those working in NGOs and voluntary and community organisations, employers, shopkeepers and other business people, cooperative members, trade union leaders and members, the police, and workers in sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation, credit, income generation and small business projects. People from universities, research bodies and training institutions also fall into this category.

The fourth category includes people and groups with **more direct influence**: those who decide policies, implement decisions, and allocate resources – and influence people's beliefs and behaviour on a wide scale. Government ministers, naturally, are the first to come to mind. But this category also includes: civil servants, planners and other officials in national, regional and local government as well as traditional leaders, professional associations (doctors, lawyers, etc.), service clubs such as Rotary and Round Table, and national and international donors and development agencies. Of particular importance in this category are people working for the mass media: newspapers, magazines, radio and television, and media 'stars' such as sporting heroes, musicians and entertainers.

In this chapter we will concentrate mainly on those in the first two categories. However, we must not forget the many other actors on the ECD stage. Without their acquiescence and support, ECD programmes will remain marginal at best.

Direct contact: the position of women

We begin with a discussion of the position of women since so many are involved in the first category, direct contact. We must stress, however, that women are found in all four categories, influencing the condition of children in many different ways.

Although a large proportion of Africa's children are being brought up by their mothers alone, these mothers often have little or no access to the educational, economic and social systems that would enable them to improve their lives and their children's future opportunities. Confidence is not easily attained in these circumstances.

While many women, particularly older women, have power within the home and community, this is almost always covert. On most levels that matter, women are at a disadvantage. As girls they are less likely to enrol in school and more likely to be withdrawn at an early age to care for younger siblings, to help supplement the family income, or to marry young. In some areas their legal rights are almost non-existent. Even if they have gained legal equality, this is rarely borne out in practice.

The subordination of women begins in early girlhood with the division of household labour by gender. African girls assume domestic responsibilities from the age of five or six years. This means that girls aged 10 to 14 work at least seven hours more a day than boys in the same age group. Almost inevitably, it is the girls who share their mothers' tasks of cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, caring for younger children, farming and income generation, herding and animal husbandry – tasks that consume most of every day. For most African women, time and leisure are luxuries: women's average workload consumes between 16 and 18 hours a day.[1]

These extraordinary disparities between the workloads and conditions of women and men are taken for granted by policy makers, planners, donors, community groups and others. Although women run the homes, bring up the children, and feed and clothe their families on what are frequently abysmally low incomes, these activities are dismissed as 'women's work'. In fact, this 'women's work' has sustained Africa throughout the centuries and keeps it alive today.

If Africa's children are to develop their true potential, then the position and status of women must be strengthened. Research shows that the better educated the mother, the more likely her children are to attend and remain at school, to be healthier and to have better nutrition.[2] Even a couple of years at school makes a difference. Thus ECD programmes must not just focus on the individual child but must be coupled with programmes that focus on the health, the nutrition, the education and the status of women. Above all, women must gain confidence in the value of their own experiences and abilities.

Supporting the natural caregivers

Because women bear the brunt of the childcare, they have the most need for support. In some cases, this should come from fathers, but the men may be absent – for work or other reasons. Women's lives could be greatly eased by the widespread introduction of inexpensive programmes. Many of these lie outside the ECD sector, such as those that aim to reduce the time-consuming burdens of food processing and preparation through appropriate technology, such as more efficient stoves.

Social changes add to women's burdens. For example, many of the other natural caregivers to whom mothers turned in the past – their own mothers, other female relatives and neighbours – now carry their own burdens. Older children should be in school, not kept at home to look after the younger ones. In many instances, the need for appropriate child care in both urban and rural areas is clear.

Childcare is not, of course, the only form of support that mothers need. They need advice on children's development from infancy, nutritional information, health facilities, and emotional and social support. In many cases, the impact of ECD programmes can be strengthened by considering all these needs.

As siblings will continue to take a share in childrearing, they could be helped by child-to-child programmes that boost their own confidence and skills (see panel on Child-to-Child in Botswana, Chapter Two, page 25).

A small but growing number of fathers participate in childrearing. They recognise the importance of the task and take joy from it. Other men interact with their young children to a certain extent. However, as participants in the early childhood seminar in Lesotho suggested, traditional roles need to be recognised and reinforced while new, mutually acceptable, interaction strategies for males need to be identified and encouraged (see panel opposite).

For example, men who are caring fathers and participate in family life could be encouraged to act as role models and to encourage other men to take their share of the work.

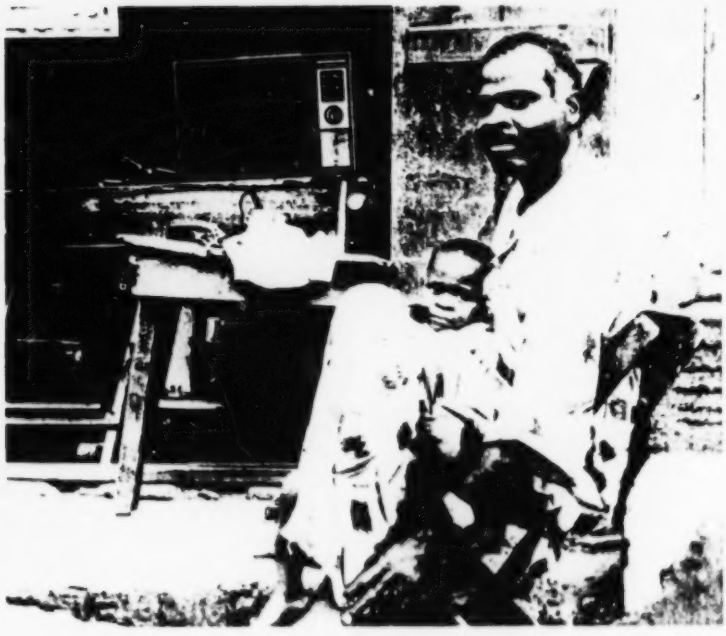
Many women act as a referral point for their friends and neighbours or hold traditional positions. Their role is to help educate young children into the ways of society. Programmes can support and assist these women by building on their existing practice and emphasising the positive aspects of tradition. Positive aspects include socialisation and telling traditional stories from their culture. By the same

Involving men in ECD

During the seminar on early childhood in Lesotho, the role of men in bringing up their children was discussed. One conclusion was that the occasional interactions that men have with children are perceived as accidental and as being of little importance. As a result, those interactions that do occur are undermined so that frequently no significant bonding takes place between father and child.

Participants listed some of the interactions that do take place:

- fathers and other male relatives assist in socialising male children
- grandfathers and older males transmit values and social mores
- men teach relevant life skills such as identification of cattle patterns, plants, landmarks, weather, etc.
- fathers and male relatives collect and relate folk tales, proverbs, family history, kinship and extended community relationships
- men help to construct buildings and equipment and help to produce learning materials using local materials.



'We need to start where men are' is a call to build upon existing interactions and the feelings that men already have for their children. Since babies and young children are seen as 'belonging' to their mothers and other women, fathers are perceived as distant figures, even when living in the same home. Their task is to punish wrongdoing. Of course, this model is not confined to Africa.

Part of the problem is that children are socialised according to their sex. In many instances, boys are seen as special and given more attention. As sex-typing is an integral part of an individual and of society, seminar participants felt that change must be viewed in the long term. One strategy is to emphasise equality, cooperation and respect in the curriculum.

To ensure balanced development, both male and female children need the presence of, and interaction with, adults of both sexes. Participants suggested some strategies that would recognise and reinforce traditional roles while identifying and encouraging new, mutually acceptable behaviour:

- empower both men and women to be self-confident and assertive as individuals and as groups
- enable people to use information and skills to take action
- assist in the formation of support groups
- appeal to men's self-concept as an integral part of the family unit
- uncover and build on the strategies now used in communities
- actively involve parents and grandparents of both sexes in learning, teaching, and ensuring that both sexes take on positions of responsibility
- encourage men who are caring fathers and participants in family life to act as role models.

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 65, January 1992.

token, programmes can work to obliterate the negative and unnecessary aspects of tradition, such as food taboos.

We have mentioned Africa's unofficial childminders, some of whom look after small groups of children in their own homes. Such women have rarely received any training for this task, though looking after a group of other people's children is a very different matter from bringing up one's own. Many are unaware of the developmental opportunities that exist in infancy and the pre-school years. Even if they have this knowledge, many lack the space and materials that are needed and cannot afford to acquire them from the low fees that mothers can pay.

The bureaucratic answer to unofficial childminders is harsh: they are condemned as illegal and attempts are made to close down their facilities. Since these childminders perform an essential function, it would be more constructive to work with these women and attempt to build on what they know. This could be done through training, regular supervision and support, and the use of small grants or loans to enable the childminders to provide safe and stimulating environments for the children in their charge.

Training ECD workers: the learning process as a learning experience

Many people, mainly women, work in the ECD field, whether as outreach workers, home visitors, childminders, playgroup leaders or pre-school workers. As ECD programmes expand and increase, many more such workers will be needed.

ECD workers should ideally enjoy their work and find it satisfying and rewarding. They should be in tune with the needs and expectations of the communities they are working in, as respected members of those communities. These requirements indicate high quality workers. Quality is, of course, not merely a matter of academic qualifications and training. It involves practical skills as much as theoretical knowledge.

Most of these workers will have had only a few years of formal education and will probably be employed as para-professionals. How are they to be trained? Any programme that seeks to support the caregivers of young children should ensure that its training methods are appropriate. Active and participatory methods help trainees to gain confidence in themselves and become facilitators rather than teachers.

A training programme should build on what people already know, not from what the trainers think they ought to tell them. Take, for example, the development of babies. As there are hundreds of books on the topic, it would be very easy to write a series of lectures on different aspects of child development. Yet women already know a lot about child development – they have been living with it all their lives.

An effective session, therefore, would allow the women to pool their own knowledge about how babies behave, how they react to different stimuli, and how their development can be encouraged. Why do ordinary people so often lack the

confidence in their own knowledge? Knowledge based on first hand experience in the local environment is at least as valid as that from books. Therefore, by sharing knowledge and participating actively in such a session, the women learn from one another and gain confidence in their own abilities. **In effect, they are both learning and teaching.** With the guidance of a trainer who acts as a facilitator, and using their pooled knowledge, they can usually solve most of the childcare problems that might arise.

It takes a very special kind of person to run such a session – a person who sees herself as a facilitator. She has to understand that people learn best by the processes of discovery and participation and she must believe that these processes are as important as the content of the sessions. As a result of their training with these processes, the trainees will go on to use these same methods – discovery and participation – in their interactions with children, parents and families.

Active participatory methods are not an easy option. Participants are called upon to think, to talk, to debate and even to argue with their colleagues. But such methods have one great advantage: the learning goes much deeper because it is accompanied by understanding, and the learning process is also a learning experience.

Such learning processes are natural. They follow the way we behave in everyday life, the way that children develop, and the way our friends, families and communities have behaved for generations. We discuss things, argue and laugh. In the process, we learn from one another. But because we are with people we know, not sitting in a classroom with a teacher at the front, we do not realise that this too is 'education'. Such natural methods enhance our self-esteem and give us confidence in our own abilities. When we interact with young children, we are able to pass this on to them because we have learned in the same way.

Selection of workers

A major question for many programmes is selection of workers: what criteria should be used to decide whom to employ and to train? Perhaps most important, workers should be acceptable to the communities in which they will work. In most cases, this will mean that workers come from those communities. In the ideal situation, the workers will be chosen by the communities.

While most programmes establish minimum criteria for such workers, these consist too often only of academic qualifications. While a basic level of literacy and numeracy is usually necessary, other criteria are of equal importance: experience with children (including experience as a mother or caregiver), a caring personality, and a wish to serve the community. Every programme establishes its own criteria for selection of workers and that is fine – as long as the participating communities help to establish those criteria and are given a say in the final choice of the workers.

When and where should workers be trained?

In general, formal education and training emphasise learning before doing. In the ECD sector this is often not possible, or even necessary. As we have seen, many practitioners have not had the possibility of training. In any case, training in ECD

should be a combination of theory and practice. When it is on-the-job and practice-based, ECD workers will gain the confidence and the skills to carry out their tasks with children and their families.

A lengthy pre-service course for field-level ECD workers is not usually necessary or even desirable. But it is useful if trainees can spend some time together as a group. When together for a period of some days or weeks, trainees build up a group feeling that enhances the possibilities of peer learning and peer support. Administratively, it may be simpler to centralise trainers, materials and other facilities. But the drawbacks should be considered: if trainees are taken out of their own environments, especially for lengthy periods, they can lose contact with their own communities and even become alienated from them. This occurs particularly when a training institution is in an urban area where the way of life is very different from the trainees' own communities.

On-site training requires careful planning and logistics. But it has the great advantage of being located in the place where the trainee is actually working. It can thus build on what exists in the specific environment. Another advantage: it enables local people – other ECD and community workers, parents, community members – to see for themselves what the training is about and sometimes even to participate in aspects of it.

Perhaps the best solution, where practicable, is a combination of methods. For example, several weeks' residential training, spread out over one or more years, could be supplemented by visits from trainers to the trainees to advise, assist, supervise and further train. In some programmes, the on-site training gathers together a small group of workers from neighbouring communities who can, as a group, support and advise one another.

In Zimbabwe, the Kushanda project trains ECD workers in the villages where they work and follows up the initial training with 'cluster workshops'. These bring together four to six workers from several villages. Not only do these workshops serve as refresher courses, but they enable the pre-school teachers to learn from and support one another (see panel opposite). This type of continued supervision and support can help any programme to ensure that quality remains high and the workers motivated.

Content of the training

What should be the content of the training? As discussed earlier, process is the most important part of training – the use of active participatory methods that enable people to learn, understand and use these same processes in their work with children and their families. But the content that is conveyed is also important. Early childhood development is not just about cognitive learning: it is about the total, or holistic, development of children. Thus training should cover child development in all its various forms: social, cultural, physical, motor, and emotional as well as cognitive. Learning should be based on local realities, not imposed from outside. This means that positive local and religious customs and traditions should be a strong element of any curriculum, as well as some basic knowledge of health and nutrition.

Some countries, in Africa and elsewhere, have drawn up national curricula that precisely specify the content of training courses as well as the content of children's learning. While it is possible to lay down overall guidelines concerning child development in matters such as health and nutrition, local circumstances should ideally dictate the final content. Programmes may consult at local and regional levels in order to determine from parents and community members what should be taught. Training programmes thus become relevant to the participants, and they gain more and learn more, so that what they pass on to children and families is acceptable and appropriate in the local context. This has been the experience in Kenya where partnerships between national and district government agencies and communities ensure a locally relevant curriculum as well as involvement of parents, older children and other community members (see panel, page 36).

On the spot training in Zimbabwe

The Kushanda early childhood project in northeast Zimbabwe began in 1984 as part of a local development plan. It included an agricultural production cooperative and expansion of employment opportunities. By the end of 1992, 138 pre-schools had been established in the project's two areas. The work is now being taken over by a federation of parents' associations.

The original problem was one of isolation. Each community of farm labourers was not only cut off from towns and many government services, but equally from similar communities on other farms. The project was thus forced to adopt an approach based on intensive on-site early childhood training of women who had already been trained as farm health workers. This innovation – born of necessity – joined health and early childhood education, and also suited the particular needs of the farm communities. It established operating pre-schools almost immediately and offered intensive education in early childhood development, buttressed by close personal involvement on the part of the trainers.

To ensure that practical training was a major part of the programme, the project insisted that training of pre-school teachers could only take place where an early childhood centre existed.

It was originally intended that follow-up training and support would be provided by scheduling regular one-or two-day visits to the teachers at the farm-based centres at least once per term. As the number of pre-schools increased, however, it became impossible to continue this level of support. This led to the introduction of 'cluster workshops' in which teachers now participate three times a year.

The cluster workshops bring four to six trained teachers together, usually at one of the farm pre-schools, for a period of three days. These workshops not only provide a concentrated refresher course on all subjects covered in the original training, but allow the teachers to discuss their progress and problems, share their experiences, express themselves freely, and develop a sense of camaraderie. All this helps to ease the feelings of isolation that teachers often experience within their own communities when they (and their assistants, if any) are the only adults to have any notion of the daily joys and pains of operating pre-schools.

Many teachers from pre-schools not associated with the Kushanda project have asked to join these cluster workshops. This indicates that Kushanda is valued among these rural communities for the quality of training and continued personal interest, not just for material support.

Source: Booker, S. (forthcoming, 1994) *We are your children*. The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

ECD in Kenya

Early childhood development has been a component of government policy in Kenya since independence in 1963. As part of the national effort of self-help (*harambee*), pre-schools were planned and set up by local communities. However, in the first decades following independence, the expansion of pre-schools was not matched by the quality of services and experiences for the children. In the 1970s, a National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) was set up to improve training and to upgrade the quality of the pre-schools. A network of District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECEs) supports these activities in the districts. Through a series of courses, trainers and teachers learn to:

- appreciate the importance of learning and play materials in the development of young children
- design and use materials to stimulate various aspects of child growth and development
- detect any children with special needs and take appropriate action to assist them
- take a lead in raising awareness among parents and the community about the need to stimulate children's development.

Over the years, involvement of the parents and communities has increased and broadened. From initial instances in which parents and communities constructed pre-school facilities and paid for the staff, they now participate at other levels. For example, in curriculum development, a participatory approach involves trainers, parents and local communities. Trainers meet parents and community members individually or in groups to collect folklore materials (stories, riddles, poems, games, plays) which are later edited and reproduced. This method has encouraged the tapping of available human and physical resources. Since parents and local communities feel that they have contributed to their children's learning, they develop confidence and a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Even older children get involved. In all the DICECEs, workshops are held to encourage primary school children to make toys and learning materials and then to play with the younger children. The ensuing child-to-child interaction is beneficial for both older and younger children.

Source: Njenga, A.W. (1992) *A case study of district centres for early childhood education in Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Education (Paper prepared for the South and East African Seminar on 'Collaborating for educational change in non-formal basic education' organised by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, January 1992); Carnegie, R. and Hawes, H. (eds, 1990) *Child-to-child and the Growth and Development of Young Children*. London, UK: Child-to-Child Trust, summarising papers by Anne Njenga and Elizabeth Kamau, presented at the International Seminar on Child-to-Child and the Growth and Development of Young Children, in Kenya in 1989.

Accreditation

When individuals have finished their training, they quite naturally expect some type of recognition. Training generally helps the individual to acquire status and respect as well as, ideally, a regular income. Yet trainees usually expect formal recognition of their training in the form of a certificate or diploma. Accreditation is in fact important in raising the status of practitioners as individuals and also of the ECD sector as a whole. Training courses may be linked with other accredited forms of vocational training, with colleges, and even with universities. It is important, however, to ensure that the granting of a certificate is based on practical competence in the field, rather than on purely academic criteria.

While certification may give confidence to the individual, it may cause parents, for example, to feel alienated or disempowered. This could, however, be the result of the training methods used. If training has encouraged a certificated worker to set herself above the parents and to act as if she is the 'expert', then there is no true partnership. Parents will feel undervalued and will not contribute the many rich experiences that they have to offer for the future development of their children. If the training has instead succeeded in producing ECD workers who value the knowledge and experience of parents and community members and who include them in all aspects of their work, then the receipt of a certificate or diploma will benefit all concerned.

Who is involved in ECD?

As we saw at the beginning, many actors appear on the ECD stage. Many of those who take leadership roles in the various institutions in our society – or any society – have the potential to influence the future of young children. Workers in sectors other than ECD need to be aware of the needs of young children and women so that they can design and implement their programmes accordingly, sectors such as agriculture, credit and small businesses are obvious candidates here. Leaders, workers and professionals in education, health, law, government, religion and political parties have the potential to influence many aspects of our lives. Therefore, all these people need to be more aware of the importance of early childhood development.

Expressed in holistic terms, a happy, healthy and secure society will only emerge if all organisations take account of the needs of society's youngest members. In the next chapter, we look more closely at the roles and responsibilities of the other two categories of actors on the ECD stage, those who play indirect roles, and those who influence our beliefs and behaviour.

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2. OAU/UNICEF (1992b), op cit.

Chapter *Four*

Who should be responsible for Early Childhood Development programmes?

In the last chapter, we identified four categories of people and groups involved in ECD. We concentrated mainly on the first two of these – the informal or natural caregivers and those directly involved in ECD through their work. In this chapter we look at the roles and responsibilities of all four categories but with more emphasis on the second two: those who play an indirect role in the lives of young children, and those who wield influence.

Before discussing responsibility for ECD programmes, we want to emphasise that responsibility for infants and children lies with their parents and families. If there is a family, no institution should ever try to replace it. **The objective of ECD programmes is to support parents, families and other caregivers.**

Second, we need to make a distinction between programme responsibility and financial responsibility. The latter aspect is discussed in Chapter Five where we look at the costs and effects of ECD programmes.

Partnerships

Effective ECD programmes result from a series of mutually dependent partnerships. The 'partners' are the persons and groups outlined above, each with a critical role to play. These should be true partnerships: this means that those involved understand and accept one another's roles. There should be mutual trust and respect for the knowledge, experience, skills and resources that each brings to the partnership. This is not always easy to achieve. Some partners (such as international funding agencies or governments) appear to have so much more power than others (parents or village communities).

Some examples of partnerships in ECD are given in the panel on pages 46-47. In Lesotho and Namibia, the national governments work in partnership with international agencies on the one hand, and local communities on the other. A similar situation exists in Kenya where, with support from international donors, the government established a National Centre for Early Childhood Education. This works through district centres, providing support, training and supervision to community-based pre-schools. These now cover some 25 per cent of three to six year olds and are used as a base for outreach activities to families and children who are not enrolled (see panel, page 36). Elsewhere, the provision of early childhood services has been largely left to individuals and NGOs, such as in South Africa (page 47).

There are, however, other examples of partnerships. The Africa Housing Fund (AHF) is a non-governmental organisation which works in rural and urban communities in Kenya with the poorest of the poor, supported by two international foundations (see panel, page 40). Women's groups implement the programmes while the AHF provides support and training in ECD, health issues, water and sanitation and income generation. In addition, management training aims to develop effective and sustainable structures.

The role of government

Many people believe that government should run ECD programmes. This may be a political opinion, or it could be based on the argument that governments have generally taken over responsibility for the formal education system and should therefore run programmes for pre-school children as well. Opponents of this view assert that formal education should not have been taken entirely out of the hands of parents and communities because the resulting schools do not teach the most appropriate skills. They also contend that the education system has alienated and disempowered parents. Ironically, these parents usually share the belief that their children's education is entirely the government's responsibility.

Where ECD programmes are concerned, there is a middle way. Up to now, few governments have made formal commitments to ECD by allocating adequate resources, possibly because of fears about costs and other burdens. Governments, however, have an essential role to play: they can set a climate of opinion. For a government is more than an exchequer. Governments set and endorse national agendas, validate private efforts, create a climate of acceptance and approval, and establish priorities. And, of course, governments act as fundraisers and conduits for donor agencies..

An integrated approach to ECD in Kenya

The Africa Housing Fund (AHF), established in 1988 in Kenya, runs programmes which assist women's groups to establish income and profit generating activities while also improving their housing and living conditions. A pilot project, begun in 1992 with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation, is working with groups in two urban and one rural area to develop a programme of community-based early childhood education and health care that builds on prior experience.

Working with the poorest of the poor, AHF trains members of the communities, usually through women's groups, to develop the necessary skills to manage their own projects. Shelter programmes are combined with programmes for employment generation, welfare and health in order to effectively reach the very poor with sustainable improvements. As poor people cannot afford to divide their lives into self-contained sectors, assistance must be integrated if it is to be effective. In Kenya, the poorest ten per cent of the population lives mostly in households headed by women.

Two women's groups based in the slums of Nairobi, the capital, have already set up a business to produce roofing tiles. They also operate a credit scheme for small-scale businesses. However, the vast majority of group members are the heads of their families and their child care problems are numerous: some take their infants to work, some have to leave them alone at home or to roam the streets. Children get lost, injured, become ill and many mothers resort to keeping their older girls out of school to look after the younger ones.

Prior to the AHF project, many of the women lived by petty trading, dancing, begging, scavenging garbage and prostitution. Because of their mothers' poverty, and abuse by fathers and stepfathers, many of the children live on the streets and do not attend school or have access to any services.

The rural programme is located in the northern semi-arid parts of Kitui district. A major problem is water and women have to spend up to six hours each day fetching it. The project here is producing building materials and constructing buildings, large water tanks and ventilated pit latrines.

The early childhood/health project is aimed at nearly 5,000 families in the two areas covering an estimated 35,000 people. It includes creches for babies and infants, day care centres for children aged 4 to 7 years, mothers' education programmes, help with homework for older children, and, in the urban area, a street children rehabilitation programme plus a school preparatory programme for 8 to 12 year olds who have missed out on schooling. The health programme has a similar number of components aimed at raising personal and community levels of knowledge, hygiene and sanitation.

AHF hopes that these programmes could be sustainable after a five-year period and can generate training models that can be used in other parts of Kenya and Africa. How can this be achieved?

One essential factor: the programmes are in the hands of the women's groups from the very start. They discuss and plan the various elements, and all activities are run by elected committees. In the day care centres, for example, elected committees oversee the whole programme and training is carried out on the job by professional trainers (who will withdraw after a period). It is intended to form about 100 mothers' clubs for the community-based early childhood programme which will be linked to the respective centres.

The health programmes are run in a similar way to the early childhood aspects – committees of elected members planning and implementing activities with the advice of a small number of AHF staff and other professionals. The strategy is based on educating the whole community, while training some people to a higher level.

A key ingredient for success, however, is an organisation and management programme that aims to develop effective and sustainable management and organisational structures for both the early childhood and the health programmes.

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter* No. 71, July 1993

At the minimum, the role of government should be to make ECD policy – in consultation with the other partners – and ensure its implementation. Such a policy would include items such as training of ECD workers; curriculum for trainers, workers and children; and laws relating to the rights of children and women. At the very least a government must be responsive to the needs of the people and play a coordinating role, tapping the strengths of NGOs and communities.

Coordination

Another coordinating role relates to a government's own actions and policies. In most countries, responsibilities for young children and their families are spread over a number of different ministries. This may be inevitable given the varying remits of health, housing, welfare, planning, finance and other ministries. However, this can lead to policies that are overlapping or contradictory or, indeed, to no coherent policy at all. To avoid this, an interdepartmental body could be established at national level to coordinate policies and actions, while similar intersectoral committees could be set up at provincial, regional and local levels to coordinate efforts right down to the village level.

For example, a government might demonstrate its commitment by establishing an ECD unit that bears overall responsibility for ECD. This unit would coordinate and monitor activities that are carried out by different ministries and by all the partners involved. Where should such a unit be located? While this is a matter for the country concerned, experience provides certain lessons. If it is located in a Ministry of Education, ECD tends to be treated as a downward extension of primary school, with consequent disregard for the many other components of early childhood. In fact, locating the unit in any existing ministry could result in ECD being subordinated to the larger needs of that sector. It is, therefore, essential for the head of the unit to be on a high enough level to ensure that the unit can carry out its tasks.

Quality and standards

Should a government itself deliver ECD services? Or should it instead facilitate them? This is a matter to be decided in the local context. But the reality in most of Africa today is that ECD programmes are run by communities, by NGOs, by churches and by various civic groups. Some of these programmes are excellent while others provide little more than custodial care. Quality and standards vary, as do access to training and curriculum content. In some ways, this is not altogether bad, for communities should be involved in what their children are learning and how they are learning it. But coordination of existing efforts, fair allocation of the limited resources available, and access to training and support services are needed.

Governments can also play a role in setting standards and regulations. These concern physical facilities, space, teacher/child ratios, and teacher qualifications. These are often set at levels that are too high. They effectively exclude the vast majority of pre-schools and community-initiated programmes. When this is the case, the standards tend to undermine community initiatives, rather than support them. The standards are often at real odds with parents' efforts to pursue and organise alternative forms of child care facilities for their children.

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Public education and advocacy

Since communities already play a significant role in the growth and development of children, all ECD programmes need to recognise this. The community is the custodian of culture, helping to ensure a safe and healthy environment and providing support for individuals and families.

Communities have a further responsibility where ECD is concerned: they can put pressure on the authorities and other influential people and groups to increase support for young children and their families. Members of communities should take every opportunity to talk about their needs to community leaders, teachers and other professionals. Whenever they meet workers in health, agriculture, water and other sectors, they should remind them to take account of the needs of young children and their families in all programmes.

This kind of activity mixes advocacy and public education, involving all ECD partners and our third category of persons and groups: community leaders, school teachers and heads, church leaders and members, political party leaders and members, shopkeepers and other business people, cooperative members, trade union leaders and members, the police, workers in sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation, credit, income generation and small business projects, and universities, research bodies and training institutions.

To a certain extent, these groups and institutions all constitute 'communities'. We use this term to denote people who come together, make things happen, and often regulate behaviour. As the members of these 'communities' have overlapping affiliations and are organised around different interests, they are all responsible for learning about the needs of young children and their families, ensuring that these needs are taken into account in the course of their activities, and advocating support for children and families when and where appropriate.

The mass media

The mass media can play an important role in ECD. Radio is a widespread form of communication and is already used for entertainment, news and public education. Some African countries have regular radio programmes on ECD and all opportunities should be taken to expand and extend both programmes and audiences.

The mass media's responsibility in ECD goes beyond this, however. Programme makers, editors and journalists need to be aware of the needs of young children and their families and should highlight these when appropriate. They should feature not only tragedy and pain but also stories of good practice and achievement.

All countries have media 'stars' such as sporting heroes, musicians, actors and entertainers. These individuals are role models for many of their compatriots. Ideally, this status would bring a sense of responsibility. Role models can help draw attention to their country's needs and encourage others to do what they can to alleviate those needs. Famous males can become important role models for fathers, showing that 'real men' can love and care for their children yet still be 'men'.

Donors as partners

The international donor community is a potentially influential partner in ECD programmes. Up to now, many donors and development agencies have ignored ECD, preferring to concentrate on other sectors. However, there are signs that this may be changing. For example, the World Bank has recently given support to ECD programmes.

Foreign donors have vast sums of money at their disposal and this can make them very powerful. The problem is that few are prepared to play the role of partner and to listen to the needs of the other partners. But in ECD, as in all development, this is essential. Foreign donors may try to impose their own agendas on recipients, while recipients rarely feel in a position to argue the issues.

The results of this are plain to see throughout the world. Therefore, donors must become more sensitive to local needs and be prepared to adjust their agendas. They must work towards relationships of mutual trust and respect – which means honesty between partners – and cease to create dependency relationships.

The same applies, of course, to all donors, not only foreign ones. Despite the economic problems of Africa, some individuals and groups are rich in both money and resources – and they too have a responsibility for ECD. Groups of business people have many skills to offer to ECD programmes. Professional associations, clubs such as the Rotary and other service clubs could give money and other forms of support. But again, this must be undertaken in the form of a partnership in which all work towards the same aims in a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

How can such people and groups be motivated to help? This is where the other partners come in – the government, ECD workers, the mass media and communities. If support is to be given, then potential partners need to be aware of the importance of ECD for the country's overall development. To persuade them to consider the needs of ECD, they must be shown examples of ECD programmes that have had positive effects. They must realise the potential of young children and have access to the results of research. Naturally, any support or donations received from new partners should be properly acknowledged.

Who should be responsible for ECD programmes?

As we have seen, all society is responsible for ECD programmes. But the main partners are the natural caregivers on the one hand and the government on the other. A government's role is basically to create an enabling environment that will permit and encourage the healthy development of young children and their families.

This does not mean – and in today's circumstances cannot mean – that massive central funds have to be diverted from other programmes and channelled towards early childhood development programmes. Central governments control many resources other than direct funds. They also act as a link to many outside funding sources. Most important, as the principal agenda-setting agencies for their countries, they can both endorse and encourage the development of local initiatives.

Governments have a tendency to be problem-oriented and to operate only in the short term. This works against the need for long term commitment to early childhood. Therefore, local institutions and funding agencies need to work together to ensure that governments see early childhood as a priority and that all policies reflect this view. This includes economic policies as well as educational, health and social policies.

The challenge is to ensure that local communities get the support they deserve without sacrificing their autonomy, dignity and traditional responsibilities.

Early childhood policies and practices

Lesotho

The major policy articulated by the Government of Lesotho with respect to early childhood is that all children between the ages of two and six years should have access to early childhood centres by the year 2000. An Early Childhood Development Unit, comprising five officers, was established in the Ministry of Education (MoE). Its tasks are:

- to create public awareness
- to provide training to 15 District Resource Supervisors (DRS)
- to mobilise community support
- to involve the community in the development of local structures for the better care of young children
- to develop and disseminate the curriculum
- to identify, design and coordinate research
- to coordinate and liaise with internal and external partners.

The MoE's early childhood programme is supported, *inter alia*, by UNICEF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The overall role of the MoE with regard to ECD is that of planning, regulation and monitoring, rather than direct delivery of services. The DRS are the unit's front-line workers. They are selected by the communities and are based in their own districts with the task of supporting and training teachers and working with parents. The actual ECD centres were started by a variety of community and voluntary groups and NGOs. Communities provide and maintain buildings, toilets and clean water supplies; they produce play materials, pay salaries and undertake the overall management of the centres. In urban areas, where most parents are working, they contribute financially to the centres; in rural areas, contributions are mostly in kind.

The ECD Unit launches public awareness meetings (called *Lipitso* in the vernacular) in different regions of the country. These meetings are called by chiefs, ECD teachers or the local community and address issues such as child care, parental and community participation, health, and nutrition. People from up to 15 communities might attend.

Other methods of raising public awareness have included ECD rallies, a travelling theatre and regular programmes on Lesotho radio. These activities facilitate the dissemination of information to the public, especially those living in remote mountain areas.

By the end of 1993, the programme involved 948 ECD centres, 1089 teachers and 15,500 children, six per cent of the country's children.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, an 'Inquiry into Pre-School Activities' was conducted under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The recommendations led to the adoption of the National ECD Programme in 1982. Initially the responsibility of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, the programme's main objectives are: 'to provide all children, regardless of socio-economic background, with ECD services' and 'to standardise ECD activities throughout the country'. From the outset the national programme recognised the importance of community-based ECD.

In 1988, the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for the programme. It was first based in the Schools Standards Division and then relocated to the Schools Psychological Services Division. The ECD section comprises five staff positions at the central level, two in each region and three in each district.

Although the programme continues to emphasise community ownership and financing, the Ministry's efforts have largely concentrated on four areas: standardisation and regulations; curriculum development; training of trainers and teachers; and development and improvement of physical facilities. The stated minimum requirements for rural ECD centres – in terms of physical facilities, space, teacher/child ratios, and teacher qualifications – are presently beyond the reach of the vast majority of pre-schools.

The training programme seeks to increase opportunities for in-service training of trainers, to continue training courses for ECD teachers in the districts, and to increase follow-up and the trainers' supervisory role. With the exception of in-service training for trainers, this strategy

has yet to recognise and validate the importance of independent community initiatives to develop some form of ECD services for their children.

Namibia

During the war of liberation, a significant percentage of the Namibian population was dislocated, causing a breakdown in the extended family structures which traditionally provided care for children. Since independence, the Government of Namibia has spelled out its commitment to the basic educational goals outlined at the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. Two documents, a 'National Plan of Action for the Children of Namibia' and 'National Policy Primary Health Care Guidelines,' were developed to provide a national framework for the support and advancement of basic health care and education for Namibia's children.

Through the National Programme of Action for Children, the government has committed itself to the development of a national ECD programme. The goal is to have one child in five of the three to five age group involved in early childhood development activities by the year 2000. This will represent an increase of approximately 300 per cent from the figure of 12,000 children currently attending child care facilities.

ECD in Namibia will be a joint effort involving various organisations. Joint partnerships are being forged between government, NGOs, churches, community groups and the private sector to meet the developmental needs of Namibia's children. The government's policy is to stimulate and respond meaningfully with training, professional support, development of guidelines and curricula, immunisation and other health care interventions in support of the most needy.

As in the rest of the continent, parents in Namibia are the main caregivers. When parents act together as a community, initiating and managing child development programmes based on needs **as they define them,** experience has shown that the programmes are stronger and more sustainable. Although government may help support these efforts, they do not drive the process. Despite the difficulties many Namibians face in providing for their families' basic needs, they demonstrate a phenomenal ability to cope. And they **are** coping.

South Africa

In South Africa, the provision of early childhood care has been largely left to individuals and NGOs. As a result, more than 90 per cent of families with young children receive no organised support or services.

A 1992 investigation into future education policies identified two key issues around which policy decisions on ECD in South Africa would have to be made. These are **coordination** and **decentralisation.**

Coordination was seen as essential for unity and to ensure redistribution and redress, as well as communication between different departments and sectors. It was felt that services for the under-fives could be part of life-long education, developmental social welfare and/or primary health care. The planners realised, however, that locating services in any one of these sectors could result in programme bias. It could also subordinate the programme to the larger needs of the sector.

Partnerships were seen as one way to resolve the centralisation versus decentralisation debate. These would involve co-responsibility between the state, the community and the private sector. Partnership was seen as essential to promote community self-help, and the trade union movement was seen as playing a decisive role in securing more equitable resource allocation for early childhood services. Foreign aid could play a crucial role in the expansion of access to programmes.

In February 1993, the two major players in the field, the South African Association of Early Childhood Educare (SAAECE) and the National Interim Working Committee (NIWC), reaffirmed their commitment in a declaration of intent to work towards a united, democratic, representative early childhood organisation to reach out to all seven million children in South Africa. The new organisation, called the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development, was launched in March 1994.

Sources: Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Lesotho. UNICEF Early Childhood Project. *Partnership for Children*, proposal submitted from UNICEF, Namibia to BvLF, November 1992; Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, Ministry of Education, UNICEF, *Report of the National Conference on Early Childhood Protection and Development*, May 1992, Windhoek, Namibia; *National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)*, (1992) Grassroots Educare Trust, Athlone, South Africa.

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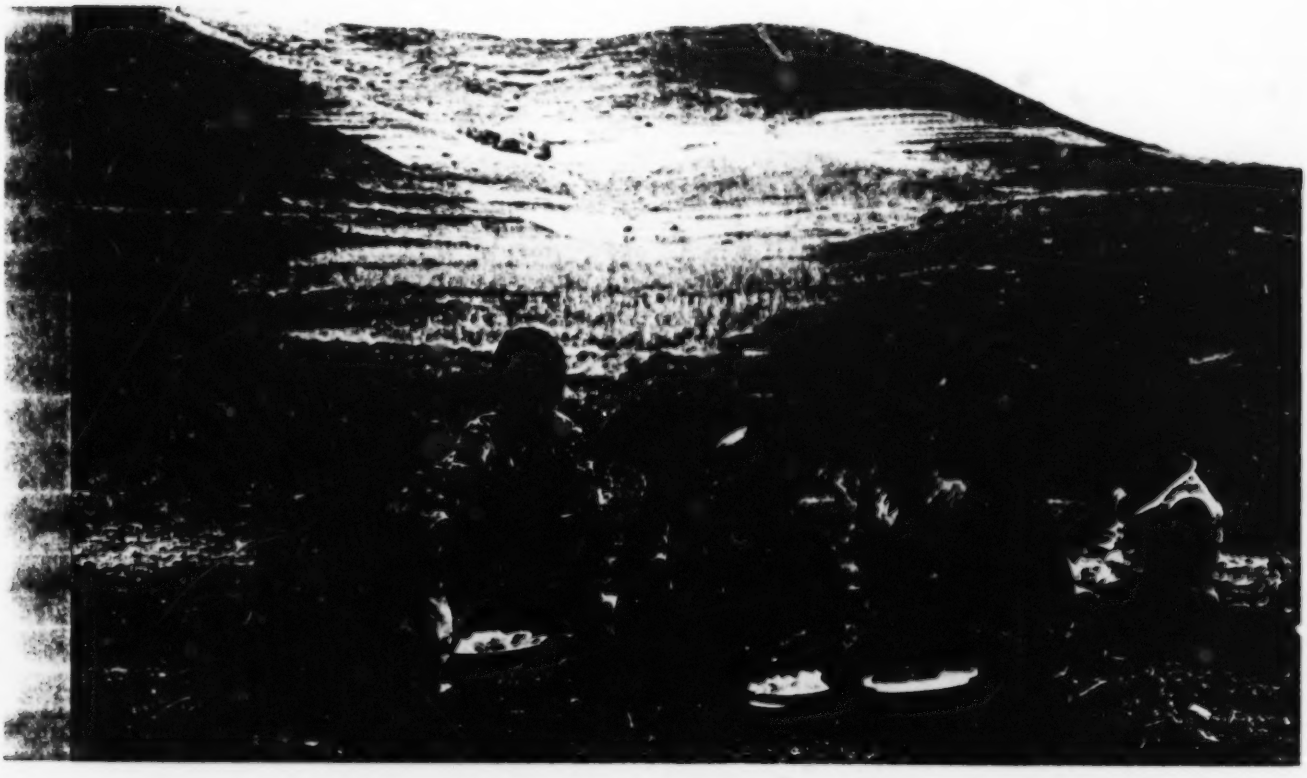


Chapter *Five*

What are the costs and effects of Early Childhood Development programmes?

'How much does an ECD programme cost?' 'What are the effects of an ECD programme?' 'Are these effects quantifiable?'

There are no easy answers to these questions. Because of varying contexts, it is difficult to make cost comparisons between programmes. While it is essential to identify desired outcomes, many are impossible to value in monetary terms. As programmes in the social sector, including ECD programmes, are usually initiated following a complex set of interactions of political, economic and social factors, the outcomes need to be judged by those same factors.

In this chapter we will examine the different elements that would have to be taken into account if the costs of ECD programmes were to be assessed. These include the resources needed as well as interaction with other programmes. Unfortunately, very little research has been undertaken to date by way of cost/effect analysis of ECD programmes. At this stage, therefore, we can only address some of the major issues.

What is meant by 'low cost'?

It is not unusual to hear programmes described as 'low cost'. But what does this mean in practice? Even more pertinent, for whom is the cost low? These aspects of 'low cost' are rarely explained.

Of far more use is the question of economic justification: is such a programme economically justifiable in the specific context (that is to say, local and/or national)? The answer to this question lies in the response to yet another: what are the desired outcomes – and do these outcomes justify the costs? Obviously, costs must not be kept so low as to undermine quality and thus lessen the potential outcomes.

Defining 'desired outcomes' is no simple task. All ECD programmes have multiple effects and multiple beneficiaries, with effects potentially lasting a lifetime.

The overall costs of ECD programmes to a national government may be low in proportion to the national budget as a whole or to the education budget in particular. But this usually means that a high proportion of the cost falls on others: local government, local communities, NGOs, foreign funding agencies and parents. Or a programme might be 'low cost' or even 'no cost' to parents because the costs are met from taxation, thus spreading the burden among all taxpayers.

All the many different sets of participants in ECD programmes can be involved in sharing costs. Although the best ECD programmes are likely to be anchored in the community, communities cannot be responsible for the entire funding. This would, in any case, be unrealistic. Communities contribute in terms of time and materials – essential elements in the funding of any community programme. Since the proportion of costs covered by the different groups of participants usually varies enormously, it is important to determine whether the distribution is equitable or whether too heavy a burden is placed on some. If communities, for example, were overburdened, the programme could break down. In any case, the 'costs' have to be weighed against the 'outcomes' for **all** the participants because they are **all** beneficiaries.

What are the effects of ECD programmes?

An analysis of cost-effectiveness requires clear definitions of the desired programme outcomes at the start. 'Desired outcomes' are frequently defined in terms of the effects of a programme on the children who participate, such as the children's school performance in the first year, or possibly in the first three years of primary level. Yet the kind of programmes that we have described have much deeper and more long-lasting effects on the children. They also affect the other people and institutions surrounding the child. As a holistic programme addresses a child in his or her environment, the outcomes affect both the child and the environment.

The emphasis on children's progress in primary school is understandable: it is largely measurable and can even be costed. In contrast, only an extremely thorough longitudinal study would trace the many beneficiaries of a quality ECD programme. Even then, it would miss some outcomes and would fail to cost many. Such studies

Why invest in the early years?

There are many arguments for allocating resources to early childhood development. They include:

Human rights Children have a right to live and to develop to their full potential. If development is arrested and nothing is done to prevent it, a basic human right is violated.

Science Scientific research demonstrates repeatedly that the early years are critical in the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour.

Social values Humanity transmits its values through its children. That transmission begins with infants. Values such as living together harmoniously or appreciating and protecting the environment begin to take hold in the earliest years and can be promoted through child care and development programmes.

Economics Society benefits economically from investing in child care and development. Productivity is increased by freeing caregivers to earn and learn, and social costs are saved in areas such as school repetition and school dropout.

Social equity By providing a 'fair start', it is possible to modify certain socio-economic and gender-related inequities. Gender-linked disparities in childrearing practice in the early years work against girls' development and educational opportunities. Early childhood programmes have the potential to correct such discrepancies.

Social mobilisation Children provide a rallying point for social and political actions that can help to build consensus and organisation for the common good.

Programme efficacy The effectiveness of other programmes can be improved by incorporating an element of early childhood care and development, focusing on healthy mental and social growth.

Changing social and demographic circumstances The increasing survival of vulnerable children (14 out of 15 children born worldwide now survive to age one, compared to five out of six in 1960), changing family structures and childrearing practices, rural-urban migration, and growing participation by women in the paid labour force all increase the need and demand for new and better ways to care for and ensure the well-being of young children.

Birth spacing and population The link between fertility rates and education levels suggests that efforts to improve the educational levels of girls and women will help cut birth rates and improve birth spacing.

Educational achievement Success at school depends to a large extent upon the foundations laid in the early years.

Some of these points will be more relevant to one situation than to another, but all are important. Taken together, they provide a compelling case for investing in programmes to improve care and enhance development in the early years.

Source: adapted from The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (1993) *Meeting basic learning needs through Programmes of Early childhood Care and Development* prepared for The Education for All Forum: The Second Meeting, Quality Education for All, held in New Delhi, India, September 1993; Landers, C. (1989) *Early Childhood Development*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre, p. 4.

are extremely expensive and their costs could be out of all proportion to the costs of the actual intervention.

There is, however, one relevant American study. Children who attended the Perry Pre-school in a poor area of Ypsilanti, Michigan, were followed up until age 27.[1] The research shows the effects on the participants in many walks of life: better performance at school, higher likelihood of high school graduation, less dependence on welfare, higher earning ability, less likelihood of criminal activities. The study also asserts that the benefits that accrued to society in general, such as 'savings' on school repetition and welfare payments, were far higher than the benefits to the individual participants.

These results must be treated with extreme caution when considering other countries. The 'savings' to taxpayers occurred in an industrialised society where participants had access to goods that many poor children in Africa lack (books, television, a well developed school system, good food, adequate nutrition) and the social service infrastructure included welfare payments, not the norm in Africa.

Another study reviewed 15 programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Clear gains for the children were found in terms of psycho-social development, health and nutrition, and primary school progress and performance. When tests were administered and comparisons made with a control group of children who had not participated, the results usually reflected positive and consistent anecdotal evidence from parents and teachers. According to this evidence, the children were more alert, sociable and curious as a result of their participation. There was even some evidence that children from lower income, more marginal families, benefitted more, cognitively and socially, than their somewhat more privileged peers.[2]

When children are ready for school and perform well enough to remain in the appropriate class for their age, this lack of repetition not only benefits the children but also results in considerable savings for the school system. A study of children in Brazil who participated in the PROAPE programme in the 1970s showed that the total cost of schooling per second grade graduate was 11 per cent lower for those who had been in the programme (including programme costs) than for those who had not.[3] Studies of Head Start programmes in the USA show similar findings: even as late as eighth grade, participants were more likely than their peers to be in the right grade for their age and were more apt to attend school regularly.[4] Such outcomes have obvious implications for the formal school system: less repetition and dropout means that the system is more efficient.

When an ECD programme includes health and nutrition components, the children themselves gain through their enhanced capacities – and so does society. When the programme affects the overall environment, in terms of water, sanitation and general hygienic conditions, the whole community benefits. If economic conditions can also be addressed, by the introduction of income-generating schemes, for example, the overall rise in living standards may well be considerable in the long term. While such outcomes will always be extremely difficult to measure in purely financial terms, these examples show that investment in ECD programmes is a long-

term undertaking with outcomes stretched over the lifetimes of the participants. Every single dollar spent at the outset may eventually result in many more dollars saved or earned in later years.

Programmes that involve members of the community in planning and management enhance the skills and abilities of those concerned, particularly when they are able to receive special training. By involving and training local women as para-professional early childhood workers, ECD programmes enable these people to learn new skills and to earn a wage. There are many examples of community members who have benefitted from their experiences with an ECD programme, gaining sufficient self-confidence to go on to further training and taking on yet more responsible positions. While the gains for these individuals may be costed in monetary terms, there is no way to put a figure on the psychological benefits to themselves and their families, nor on the gains to society as a whole of having more highly trained and motivated citizens.

Participating in a management committee or training to become a para-professional are not the only ways that community members become involved in ECD programmes. Parents, especially mothers, tend to be the most closely involved. But other family members, elders, neighbours, teenagers and older siblings all benefit from learning new ideas and from contributing their own knowledge. Many of these gains are psychological and can be described in terms of increased self-confidence – though few are measurable in purely monetary terms.

ECD programmes help stimulate parents to become involved in their children's education. Too often, education is seen as something that happens within the confines of a school. The teachers are 'in charge' and parents are neither encouraged or even allowed, in many cases, to venture into these confines. But parents involved in an ECD programme gain more confidence in their own abilities and knowledge and are far more likely to expect their children's teachers to work with them and to share the educational tasks. Such parental attitudes can only result in more relevant and effective schools: a gain for the children, the parents, the teachers, the school system and for society in general.

In many instances, parents actually decide to continue their own education as a result of their children's participation in an ECD programme. Parent education sessions that are run as part of a programme not only deal with children's development, health, and nutrition but frequently cover many wider issues. Participation encourages parents, especially mothers, to want to know more and to pursue other forms of training.

What are the costs of ECD programmes?

Just as it is impossible to calculate accurately all the effects and benefits of ECD programmes, it is difficult to assess all the costs. Cost calculations frequently omit many aspects and include only the costs to the national government or to the international donor. Such calculations ignore the many other players in this field. They also tend to overlook non-financial contributions to ECD programmes.

Obvious monetary costs include buildings, furniture and equipment, salaries, transport and materials. In-kind costs of time and resources from community members must be considered as well. It is also necessary to include costs of training and supervision as well as administration. These latter costs are frequently hidden. This is because some of these tasks are undertaken by head teachers of schools, trainers or administrators who devote only a part of their time to the programme. In many instances, these people work in NGOs or at different levels of government. Yet to obtain a full picture, they should all be included.

Some evaluation or research is essential to monitor the efficacy of the programme and adapt it where necessary. Thus research costs must be included as well. The costs of new projects – whether labelled 'pilot' or 'experimental' – are bound to be high and may well raise the overall costs to what appears to be an unacceptable level. However, if the outcome is a programme that can be disseminated over a wide area, this outlay may be justifiable.

Most important, any research undertaken must be relevant and the results presented in a usable way. This point was stressed by participants attending the early childhood seminar in Lesotho. They noted that academics and practitioners do not communicate sufficiently with one another (see panel, page 54).

When a programme aims to reach the neediest families, it may sometimes be less costly to include all the families in an area. Trying to identify and exclude those who are not 'in need' may prove too costly and time consuming.

Charging fees to parents is frequently seen as a way to 'lower' costs. But this 'lowering' of costs applies only to the other participants (usually public authorities). If parental fees are treated as income, they should also be seen as costs to the parents. While charging fees may exclude the most disadvantaged children because their parents cannot afford to pay, many programmes believe that fees are essential to ensure a commitment and to enhance motivation.

'Community costs' are the most difficult to assess as they usually involve 'donations' of time and materials. There are two ways of viewing these donations. On the one hand, it has been argued that the contributions made by community members should be seen as **benefits**. In this view, community members willingly give their time and resources in return for positive gains: enhancement to their quality of life, knowledge and skills.

Is research needed?

'Research' is a word that inspires mixed feelings in many people. On the one hand, many believe that 'more research is needed' but on the other, they often fail to use research results. The reasons for this apparent contradiction were examined during the Early Childhood Seminar held in Lesotho.

Much research has been done on African children and families. Sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and others from Africa, Europe and the USA have written many dissertations and learned articles. But many of these are gathering dust on remote shelves.

As one university lecturer explained to her fellow participants: 'If I do research, I am not going to automatically translate it so that it is available to everyone – unless I know there is a purpose.'

Although this lecturer was referring to English-language research, she was acknowledging that books or articles aimed at academics and those aimed at popular audiences are written in two different languages. For lack of 'translation', much potentially useful data or observation is never even read – much less applied. As another academic noted, 'Academics don't think in terms of processing this information for practitioners'.

Policy makers and practitioners alike argued that researchers tend only to **study** a problem rather than come up with suggestions of what to do about the problem. There was a feeling that communities and organisations are treated by academics as objects of research: they are not involved, their views are not sought, and they receive no feedback. Participants recognised that there is a need for practitioners and policy makers to link agendas with academics in order to influence decisions about the topics being researched and the way in which findings are disseminated.

Research, however, is not only undertaken by academics with university qualifications. In the course of their work, all practitioners collect information which they or their organisations analyse. This tends to be called 'documentation' or 'reporting' because the very word 'research' frightens people.

Whatever it is called, there is a need to help ECD workers acquire basic skills so that they can collect data and analyse it. As one practitioner put it: 'If you leave it to the university, it will take too long until the information comes back to us. If the teachers and trainers do it, they will know what works, they will know how the community is changing, and they can adapt the programme to the changing needs.'

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 66, April 1992.

Additionally, if mobilisation of the community is seen as a programme goal, it cannot be counted as a programme cost. If volunteer time were costed, it could result in an impossibly high overall amount. According to this argument, only costs in the form of actual financial contributions should be calculated.[5]

In the opposing view, some attempt should be made to put a price on community time and materials. Without them, it is argued, the programme could not function. Therefore, if time and materials are not priced, credit is not given to the essential contributions being made at the community and individual levels.

An analysis of the costs and effectiveness of a community-based ECD programme in one Kenyan district concluded: 'It is clear that the major burden of providing resources to the programme rests with the parents and communities.'[6] But the

report also noted large variations in these contributions and questioned how long the community contributions could be maintained. Once the initial goal of establishing a pre-school is achieved and the children of the original founders have moved on, contributions are likely to fall.

Whether or not we attempt to put a figure on contributions by the community, we should not ignore the **opportunity costs**: what would the person concerned have been doing otherwise? What does it 'cost' that person, or the family, to participate? For example, if women give time to an ECD programme that they would otherwise devote to household chores, this results in yet another burden on their already heavy workloads. In communities where four-and five-year olds would normally be expected to watch the cattle, feed the poultry or look after younger siblings, how are these tasks to be accomplished if the children are participating in an ECD programme?

The reverse may also be true: shared caregiving for a few hours a day may release other caregivers to engage in different activities such as earning or learning.

As we have seen above, when the benefits are so widespread, it may seem wrong to attach a unit cost to an individual child or family. It therefore follows that the calculation of a unit cost should be treated with some caution. Moreover, such costs should be put in perspective in relation to indicators of the economic context in which the programme operates (such as the minimum wage or GDP) and to the expected or actual programme outcomes.

Another note of caution: when analysing costs, is the objective to analyse **actual costs** or **theoretical costs**? For example, a programme might aim to reach all families in a given area with children under three. In this case, the costs might look very reasonable. However, if the analysis were made on the basis of the number of families in the target group that have actually been reached and have remained in the programme for six months, or on the actual attendance of children, the programme might appear to be far more expensive.

Whether a programme is seen to be inexpensive or expensive is a judgement that can only be made in the local/national context by the various partners. And that judgement can only be made in relation to the outcomes.

Where are the resources to come from?

We have seen that many locally donated resources of time and materials used in ECD programmes never appear in any budget. Although these must be taken into account when assessing available resources, it is important that families and communities are not overburdened, especially if they are already disadvantaged and under great pressure and strain in their daily struggle to survive.

Quite often, the ability to mobilise resources is more important than the cost of a specific programme or, indeed, than the apparent lack of resources. And mobilising the needed resources is at least as much a matter of political will as an economic challenge.

Another issue involves the two types of resources: new and existing. For 'new' resources are rarely to be found for ECD programmes: even a 'new' grant from an international agency will be a re-allocation for that funder. Obtaining 'new' funds from foreign donors could lead to future problems if these funds are given as loans and therefore result in future debts. But grants should also be treated with some caution: will the use of the money raise expectations that will be impossible to meet when the money runs out? Are conditions attached to the grant that are incompatible with local perception of needs? To avoid these problems, existing resources must be identified and mobilised before too much effort is expended on finding new ones.

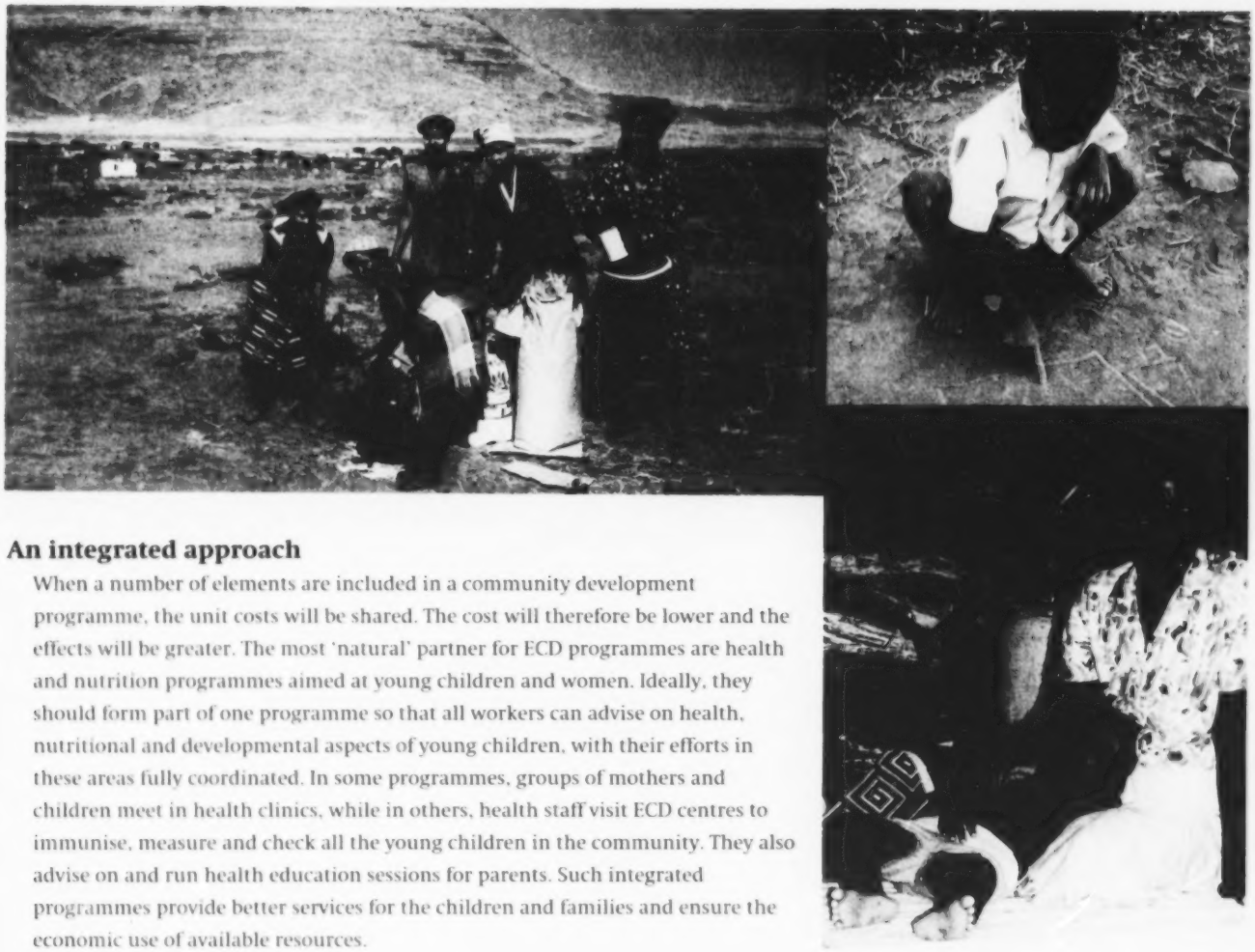
The redistribution of existing resources can be seen at various levels. In the tax system, a very small sum levied per taxpayer will amount to a sizeable sum for a programme. For example, in Colombia the government introduced a two per cent payroll tax in 1974 (subsequently increased to three per cent) to help pay for a national family welfare programme that includes ECD.

Other redistributive methods involve the re-allocation of funds within a sector or between sectors. During the 1980s, of all official development assistance for education to sub-Saharan Africa, 34 per cent went to tertiary education and only seven per cent to the primary level: there is no record of how much, if any, went to ECD.[7] A study in Kenya found that just one-tenth of one per cent of the national education budget was allocated to the national ECD programme compared to 60 per cent for primary education, 15 per cent for secondary education, and 22 per cent for universities.[8]

In practice, 'finding resources' is essentially a matter of efficient and effective use of available resources. Economies of scale can be achieved by linking ECD to programmes in the education sector or in other sectors such as health, nutrition, sanitation, agricultural extension and, particularly, programmes aimed at women. Ensuring coordination of different projects should also provide savings. It is useful as well to change the design of a programme so that decisions are made at appropriate levels rather than having to go through many layers of bureaucracy. Available resources (for example, transport, telephones, typewriters) should be assessed. Are they appropriate or would additional resources enhance effectiveness? This kind of assessment could save money in the long term.

The mobilisation of dormant or under-used resources – the goodwill of communities, the time of elders, or the knowledge, expertise and resources of private sector companies – could have an enormous impact on an ECD programme. In fact, people themselves are often the most underutilised resource. When early childhood workers were brought together in Namibia, for example, new ideas, strategies and materials emerged. All these elements existed – but were never before recognised or even contemplated (see panel page 59).

The opportunity for public education should not be forgotten. At very little cost, existing resources – such as the mass media – can be used to inform a wide public about the needs of young children. The public can be encouraged to support ECD programmes and the development of young children in many ways.



An integrated approach

When a number of elements are included in a community development programme, the unit costs will be shared. The cost will therefore be lower and the effects will be greater. The most 'natural' partner for ECD programmes are health and nutrition programmes aimed at young children and women. Ideally, they should form part of one programme so that all workers can advise on health, nutritional and developmental aspects of young children, with their efforts in these areas fully coordinated. In some programmes, groups of mothers and children meet in health clinics, while in others, health staff visit ECD centres to immunise, measure and check all the young children in the community. They also advise on and run health education sessions for parents. Such integrated programmes provide better services for the children and families and ensure the economic use of available resources.

Feeding programmes are a feature of many ECD centres. These are generally believed to increase attendance by the target population and can be seen as a cost-effective way to deliver the extra nutrients. The effectiveness depends, however, on the adequacy of the rations, on the consistency of the feeding, and on the children's general health. Such programmes could reach beyond the children who attend the centres and provide food for other – younger – children in the area. If a feeding programme is established to ensure that children are adequately nourished, it makes little sense to wait until they are three years old before giving that help.

If sanitation, water, agricultural, income generation and women's programmes are also coordinated with child development, health and nutrition, such an integrated approach presents a very real opportunity to influence the child's total environment and that of the community as a whole. Although each of these areas has its own specific field of knowledge, workers can coordinate their activities in such a way that costs are kept down and benefits multiplied.

Perhaps the best solution is a 'menu' or department store model which gives parents just 'one door'. When they knock on this door, they find a broad range of programmes, services and activities on offer.

It is worth stressing that more benefits will accrue if programmes are of high quality, if parents and communities are involved in decision making as well as implementation, if the approach to children is holistic, and if all the partners, from international to local, agree on the needs of the children and ways of meeting those needs. While such programmes do not need vast numbers of highly trained professionals, the approach itself must be professional.

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Namibia: building effective support networks

Namibia became independent from South African rule in March 1990. Since then, the level of services in early childhood development has increased 30 per cent. The government was quick to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has committed itself to support early childhood development. Significantly, ECD has remained firmly in the hands of parents and the local communities.

Many gathering places are found: churches, houses, stick shelters near a clinic. In each of these 20 to 40 children come under the care of one or two mothers, while older siblings attend primary school. These mothers provide the children with a programme based on local resources – stones, songs, games.

At the same time, however, those in the field often complain of a lack of other ECD materials and information. These workers face a difficult situation: long walks to work, low or no salaries, often no available water, lack of transport, and long distances to towns. They tend to be isolated from each other and are not encouraged to voice their own opinions about the needs and aspirations of their children, or to seek common answers and solutions.

To combat this isolation, the workers need opportunities to meet and share their experiences and to develop appropriate materials. This process can be enhanced and accelerated when people come together on a regular basis. While these opportunities to meet may be called 'training sessions', 'training' may actually be a secondary consideration. As the dialogue between participants is the essence and strength of such gatherings, the resources which colleagues can offer each other should not be underestimated.

In one Namibian church, for example, 35 early childhood workers from rural villages in the north come together four times a year. Although initially envisaged as a training and upgrading course, it became a strong support group. These women (and one man) faced common problems and issues with a great reserve of experience, imagination and concern.

To expand the dialogue, visits were arranged to the different areas to see some programmes in action. When the participants saw, first hand, what others were doing, their interest in developing and sharing materials increased. As a result, innovative strategies emerged for those living in the rural areas.

For example, the visiting participants found ways to use the clay from river beds and to make glue out of a local seed pod. Another visit encouraged local parents to raise money for ECD materials by making and selling baskets.

Thus development of material resources begins with better communication. When parents and early childhood education workers (who are themselves members of the community) meet to share their concerns, a support network can form. When people visit each other and see different approaches to similar situations, a relevant exchange occurs. This exchange in part involves an enhanced perception of the work they are doing with young children. This is the essential initial step in the process of developing resources.

Source: *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter*, No. 68, October 1992.

Chapter *Six*

ECD: an agenda for the future

Children are our future. What happens to children from the very earliest years affects their development and the development of our society and our world. For we live in a 'global economy' with global telecommunications, transport and media, where everything is interconnected. Events and circumstances in one community affect other communities, events and circumstances in one country affects other countries, and events and circumstances on one continent affects other continents.

No matter where we are, therefore, the situation of Africa's children matters to us. They constitute a significant proportion of the 'global community'.

As we have seen, children in Africa face a set of serious problems: economic decline, malnutrition, poor or non-existent health care, inadequate services, civil conflicts and war. Yet at the same time, large numbers of African children are growing up in families and communities that recognise children's particular needs. Increasingly too, governments and policy makers realise that failure to pay attention to children is at the heart of many current problems. They recognise that a new kind of investment is required: investment in human resources.

A focus on the human factor in development benefits everyone: the individuals concerned, their communities, their countries and, ultimately, the global community. This focus also implies new ways of looking at problems and a search for possible solutions that are empowering, participatory and sustainable.

What can be done to improve the situation of children in Africa? First, we must acknowledge that parents and families are responsible for their children. Most already do all they can to ensure that their children survive and thrive. Second, we must accept that the world has changed and that many parents and families find it increasingly difficult to achieve their aspirations for their children. Third, we must set in place programmes that support parents, families and other caregivers. As the most effective programmes result from partnerships, we must ensure that parents, families and caregivers are always among the partners.

Early childhood development programmes are not a luxury. There is little choice about whether to support young children and their families. The choices are about approaches and strategies to children's development. Much depends on the setting, audience, resources, and the reality of daily life for children, families and communities.

Many approaches can be taken to ECD programmes, but the basis must be building on what exists rather than imposing alien solutions. By blending the essence of traditional patterns of learning with the understanding and techniques of modern educational practice, children and their families can be provided with the springboard they need to function effectively in today's world – without losing the rich value system that has sustained their societies for thousands of years.

This means working with the people and institutions that now support children and their families in order to enhance and reinforce their efforts. When there is a need for child care, as is increasingly the case, it is possible to design imaginative programmes that are firmly rooted in the local community. Such programmes stimulate the children to appreciate their culture and traditions while helping to prepare them for their future lives.

Early childhood development needs to be holistic development. This applies on two levels. The first is the holistic development of the child, including health, nutrition, motor skills, socialisation, and emotional and cognitive development. The second level helps the child to see him or herself as part of the immediate community and the wider global society.

With these concepts in mind, it becomes evident that early childhood programmes involve more than providing sufficient pre-school places for children before they enter the formal school system. They involve the quality of the child's learning environment, the relationships children have with their caregivers and the surrounding environment, and promotion of a child-friendly environment.

The mother's situation is a key factor in the quality of a child's learning environment. Thus the needs of children cannot be separated from the needs of

women. Clearly, a mother's health and nutritional status prior to, during and after pregnancy has a profound effect on the quality of her children's lives; indeed, it may determine their chances of survival. Beyond health and nutrition, the status of women has an exponential effect on their children: the better educated a woman, the more likely her children are to be healthy, adequately fed and to attend and remain in school. Improving women's access to other services, such as credit, land and agricultural inputs, training in setting up and managing small businesses and income generating activities, also improves the child's learning environment.

Early childhood development is thus a multi-sectoral responsibility. Parents and families have the day-to-day responsibility and are their children's first educators. However, support from others is vital.

Governments can play a pivotal role in creating an enabling environment. Such an environment requires an adequate infrastructure for families, communities, NGOs and others to use and build on. As the main agenda-setting institutions, governments must demonstrate their commitment to children and families by ensuring that all ministries and departments are aware of the needs and take them into account when planning and implementing programmes.

Many fear that a focus on early childhood programmes will cause resources to be shifted from other vital social needs. This can be avoided by more efficient use of existing resources and by locating under-used or hidden resources. This is an area where government can take a lead and encourage other institutions and agencies to do likewise.

ECD interventions do not necessarily have to be expensive. By effectively combining human and financial resources, ECD becomes affordable – and gains greater local acceptance and sustainability as well.

Above all, child development is both a parental and a social responsibility. The basic values and culture that are transmitted to young children reflect the family and community into which they are born. Listening to what family and community members want is the first step in helping them to play a major role in finding acceptable and affordable solutions. And, as the examples in this publication demonstrate, there are no shortages of those solutions among African families and communities.

Early childhood development should be seen as the basic underpinning for society's future and the foundation of a healthy, prosperous and creative nation. But ECD programmes are just as much for the children themselves. Children have the right to be cherished and to be loved, to be cared for, well-fed, stimulated and appreciated. The challenge for all those who care about Africa's future is to ensure that its children grow up in an environment in which they can fulfil their potential.

Abbreviations used:

CTC	Child-to-Child
ECD	Early childhood development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IMR	Infant mortality rate
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	National Plan of Action
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODA	Official Development Assistance
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Photographs

front cover: Nigeria; page 1: Lesotho (left), South Africa (right); page 2: Nigeria; page 6: South Africa; page 9: South Africa; page 10: Mozambique; page 14: Kenya; page 16: Zimbabwe; page 18: Mozambique; page 20: Lesotho; page 22: Mozambique; page 25: Botswana; page 27: Mozambique; pages 28/29: Lesotho; page 31: Nigeria; page 36: Kenya; page 38: Nigeria; page 39: Botswana; page 42: South Africa; page 45: Kenya; pages 46/7: Zimbabwe; page 48: Lesotho; page 52: Nigeria; page 53: Mozambique; page 57: South Africa (left), Kenya (right), Zimbabwe (below); page 58: South Africa; page 59: Botswana; page 60: South Africa; page 62: Mozambique

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About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private institution based in The Netherlands. Originally created for broad humanitarian purposes, it now concentrates its resources on support for early childhood development.

The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's income is derived from this enterprise – Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer – which is established in over 30 countries and whose core business is the manufacture of packaging products.

The central objective is to improve opportunities for young children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. The Foundation uses two main strategies to accomplish this objective:

- it supports the development of innovative field-based approaches in the area of early childhood development; and
- it shares relevant experience with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

This means that the Foundation supports projects in the field and also advocates for policies and practices that will create improved conditions for children. With experience gained from supporting hundreds of projects around the world, the Foundation's philosophy and activities are embedded in the realities of life.

The Foundation believes that in order to improve opportunities for young children it is necessary to work with the people who surround them and who can have an influence on their lives. This includes parents, siblings, other family members, communities, organisations that provide services, local and national governments and international institutions.

The Foundation does not run any field-based projects itself. Instead, it offers support to organisations in the different countries. These organisations include government departments, local municipalities, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations. These local partners are responsible for all aspects of a project – development, management, training, implementation, evaluation. They also contribute a proportion of the costs in terms of both money and services.

In 1994 over 120 major projects are being supported by the Foundation in more than 40 countries around the world. These include industrialised as well as developing countries. In accordance with its statutes, the Foundation gives preference in its project support to activities in countries where the company is established.

In Africa, the Foundation is currently supporting projects in Botswana, Egypt, Kenya, Lesotho, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe.

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